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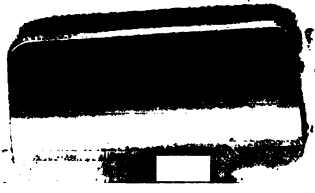

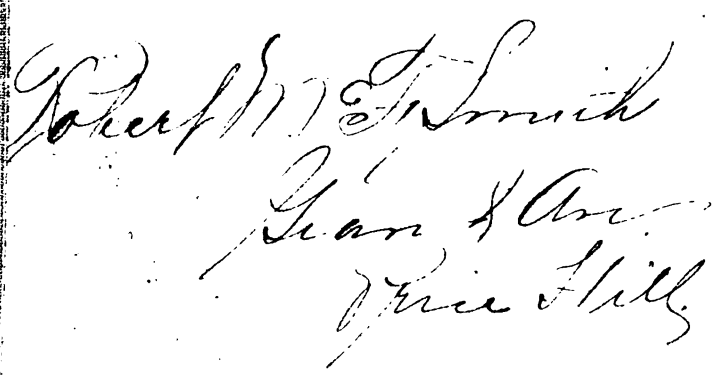

Windy Creek

Windy Creek

By Helen Stuart Thompson

Charles Scribner's Sons
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PREFACE

Lest the writer be thought to be holding up a primitive people to ridicule, a few words of explanation may be necessary.

It is not my wish to decry religion: I have seen instances of sincerity and child-like faith, especially among the Free Methodists. There is one Evangelist now preaching in the rain-belt who gave up his position of railroad engineer to work and suffer for a pittance in the cause of Christ. But as an eye-witness to the shallowness and absurdities palmed off on a credulous community under the name of religion, it has been my wish to set forth the harm of emotional religion—to show how the glaring inconsistency between professions of holiness and imperfect lives tends to dull the moral sense.

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WINDY CREEK

I

A COLORADO CLAIM

Whoever on a clear day climbs Pike's Peak may catch a bird's-eye view of the rain-belt rolling eastward from its foot: a grassy strip amid arid plains; a fertile spot in the alkaline desert, coaxed into verdure by rain-clouds that, swept from mountain-heights by light and ever-moving winds, sometimes hover and dissolve themselves in showers.

Pregnant with a sense of profound isolation is this plain, its monotony broken alone by winding creeks, high hills, and steep descents, and ever-changing panoramas of light and shadow on the mountain-range lying to westward; even the long, irregular lines of telegraph poles, the whistle of the locomotive, and the rumble of the train bring

but an instant's unreal memory of the far-off, busy world.

From out of the east and the south and the north drift the settlers, file on quarter sections, run barbed wire around their lands, put up shanties, and so found homesteads for their families. Corn waves on the hill-sides. The lowlands are marked off in dull green potato-patches. At intervals of a few miles are the schoolhouses, within whose bare walls the children spell out their lessons, and their elders listen to doctrines variable and changing as the winds that sweep the prairies and wither the young corn and send on aimless, flying trips the unstable tumble-weed.

In early times one of the rain-belt's sandy water-courses, dry except in time of August floods, was known by the name of Windy Creek; and the settlement that emigration has scattered along its banks is to-day known by no other name. Here the winds blow almost incessantly. On the stillest days there is ever perceptible a gentle motion of the atmosphere. There is infinite variety in fitful breeze, mad whirlwind, tur-

bulent gust, or steady gale. But the greater the altitude, the lighter the wind; never in the memory of the oldest inhabitant has even so light a structure as his hen-house been overturned, bluster the elements how they may.

To this lonely region, for three successive Septembers, came the Wood cousins: Ruth, invalided by a brief life-struggle too eagerly tried, sought a respite on her claim, and Hermia bore her company. There could be no rude jostling here; on these broad homesteads there was a chance for the feeblest, there was room to expand in this pure air and sunshine. Here were virtues flourishing as the flowers of the field: hospitality, simple-heartedness, temperance, charity—far from the city's baneful breath, living close to the heart of nature, the country people must be both innocent and good.

A haven of refuge was the home-ranch, adjoining. With an old horse and wagon at their disposal, the country for miles around was theirs to explore. Housekeeping duties dwindled to a slight routine.

"Early to bed and late to rise" became their maxim, and few were the sunrises they troubled themselves to see. With a little of sewing and mending, and much of driving and visiting, the short days flowed easily on; between them they kept a journal alive with incident; they read aloud; twilight walks and talks ended the day. A drowsy existence, but brimful of healthful idleness, profit, and peace.

The first night in the little gray shack alone on a sea of prairie was a wakeful one. Sleep fled before the sense of solitude. Every nerve was tense. Sounds broke on the ear with exaggerated distinctness: the ticking of an insect in the wood, the crickets' shrill fiddling, the early twitter of little birds, and the quick scratching of their tiny feet on the roof. These sounds passed into insignificance before a howl that cleft the stillness—a wild, curdling, long-drawn howl, and a burst of barks and yelps and yells, and weird, uncanny laughter. Imagination pictured a wolf and the answering pack. But the ventriloquous throat of a single tawny-coated coyote produced both

howl and yelping and laughter, sounds that speedily familiarize themselves to inhabitants of the prairie.

As the cousins sat down to the breakfast-table, their nervous fears of the night and the darkness dispelled by the yellow sunshine that streamed in across the floor, a quick step sounded without, and a shadow darkened the doorway. A young woman stood on the threshold, her tall form illy fitted by a gown of dark-blue calico, her face sparkling in the depths of her sunbonnet.

"Hello, Ruth! Thought I'd ketch you jist gittin' up!"

She burst in and noisily kissed Ruth, who in some confusion presented their nearest neighbor, Rose Rooney.

"I heard you had a cousin come to visit you," said the caller, staring hard. "Howdy do? You don't favor Ruth one bit, nor your aunt and uncle, neither. You're twic't as big as the whole outfit. You girls goin' to bach here? Gracious! Ain't you 'fraid to stay alone nights? I'd be! Set still! Don't quit your breakfast fur jist me, I'll set on the trunk!"

She spoke in exclamatory bursts. Her voice was loud and brisk, with pleasant, ringing tones. She pulled off her bonnet and fanned her heated face, while her observant glance swept the room, taking a rapid inventory of the curtains, the rugs, the dishes on the table, and the books and photographs ranged on shelves around the bare pine walls.

"'S your cousin expectin' to stay all fall with you? Her ma needs her at home, I'll bet. You girls do about as you please when you're bachin', don't you? Let your pa work your claim fur you; don't even have to dig your own taters fur dinner—my! and lay around and take it easy. Git up late, have your meals when you like—my land! You hadn't ought to want more'n two meals a day when you git up so late. You jist ought to see the work I put through only this mornin'—afore you girls was up, most likely. I milked an' got breakfast an' got the kids up an' give them their breakfast an' slopped the pigs an' done a churnin' an' washed up after it an' scrubbed my floor; an' then I come over here. I've got so

much to do I jist can't see straight. There ain't no let up to it, neither. Jist wait till you git married, if you want to know what work's like!"

She glanced knowingly at Hermia, who noticed that her eyes, set too close together, gave her face an expression of cunning.

"You look lots better 'n what you done last summer when I first seen you, Ruth," continued the visitor. "You use' to look kind o' peaked. Folks that's sick looks so old, don't they? But you look lots younger 'n you use' to. Land! I couldn't be sick if I tried. I ain't got no time to be sick. Layin' around in the house an' doin' nothin' 's what ails you. You git out more an' work out-doors an' you'll soon be as well an' strong as anybody. Take a wheel-barrow an' run it 'round the house every day, if you can't git nothin' else to do. That'll limber you up! I see your pa's give you a horse an' wagon—you want to ride if you can't walk; you want to ride out to church Sundays—say! we've got us a new preacher sence you was out here last!"

"What is his name?"

"Mr. Crimp. He's a rustler, too. He's got the whole country converted, most, sence he come out here last March; an' he gives immersions every two weeks, reg'lar."

"He must be a Baptist, then."

"No, he ain't no Baptist. He's what they call a Campbellite preacher. He preaches beautiful sermons, they make you laugh an' cry! I wish 'twas Sunday every day of the week, sence I was converted, so's I could go an' listen to that man preach. An' I never use' to care fur preachin' nor nothin'. I tell you religion's made a great change in me. You jist ought to hear Mr. Crimp, girls; you never see a man that knowed as much as he does, an' he so modest about it, too. He's jist as common, he don't put on no airs at all. You folks is Presbyterians, ain't you? Now I never would care to be one of them kind—I'd rather be a Campbellite. Presbyterians is so high-minded."

"Have you been immersed?"

"I ain't yit, but I'm goin' in the water come Sunday, if I live. Ruth, have you got that princess pattern of yourn that your ma

said you had? I'm makin' my dress that I'm goin' to be immersed in, kind o' princess-like, clos't fittin' an' long enough to drag. Em, that's my sister, she come over yisterday an' helped me cut it out. But the thing didn't hang together right, someway, an' I had a good cry over it. Your ma said you had a reg'lar princess pattern, so I jist posted over fur it. Goodness! I must be goin'! Them young uns o' mine 'll set the house afire afore I git back!"

Ruth brought out her box of paper patterns and rummaged through it.

"I don't see how you are going to have your gown ready by Sunday," remarked Hermia.

"Oh, I don't putter over my sewin'! Onc't I git it cut out to suit me, I'll slap it together someway! I'll have the thing out o' the way afore the men come home to their supper to-night."

"What sleezy curtains you've got!" cried Mrs. Rooney, fingering the cheesecloth drapery. "Flour sackin' 'ud wear better. An' look at them beds, narrow as all git out! I sh'd think you *would* want to

hang curtains in front so's folks couldn't see 'em! Why, they're jist bunks, made fast to the wall! Don't you feel like you was gittin' into your coffins?"

Her busy eye roved about.

"Land! Look at them books! I never see sich a family fur books an' papers! You ain't got hardly any flies yit, have you? But they'll find you out when you begin to leave victuals 'round. You jist ought to see the flies to my house! You're awful crowded here, ain't you? Guess your pa built you a little bit of a house to match you, Ruth! Ha, ha! I allus have to pick on Ruth about her size; but don't you mind me, I was jist joshin'! Ain't you 'fraid to stay alone nights? I'd git nervous in a place like this where they ain't no man 'round. Well, I must be goin'."

Rose Rooney stood for an instant poised in the doorway, swinging her bonnet by the strings. Her bold, free attitude brought to mind some tameless creature of the plains. She was tall, with large-boned, muscular frame. Her skin was richly browned; a bright color burned in her cheeks. Her

blue-black hair grew low on her forehead and temples, and its smooth strands she had twisted into a knot on the nape of her neck. Framed by black brows and lashes, her eyes, though slightly marred in expression by their proximity, were wide open, blue, and sparkling.

"You girls must come over and spend the day! I'll send you word by Jimmy. You must come good 'n' early now! Good-by!"

The Wood cousins lingered at the door to admire her quick stride, and to make sure that she was out of ear-shot before discussing their neighbor.

Toward the close of the long sleepy afternoon a hesitating knock shook the latch. Hermia, rising to open the door, was confronted by a large, scoop-shaped hat, trimmed with bunches of flowers so purple as to hurt the eye, its flaring brim filled in with wiry black hair tortured into a thousand frizzles and kinks, and by a round, brown, smiling face, the centre-piece of all this adornment. Behind, a younger girl stood giggling; sandy in complexion, snub-

nosed, her pudgy form arrayed in a short sky-blue frock, yellow flowers on her hat, green ribands tying the hay-colored braids of her hair.

Cicely and Polly Bunt, daughters of a neighboring ranchman, trooped in, staring about them with the frank curiosity of very young children. They sat down, stiffly at first, each on the extreme edge of her chair, but presently relaxed into easier positions. The younger began stripping off her cotton mitts, for which breach of etiquette she was properly reproved by her sister.

"Don't take off your half-handers, Poll, when you're out callin'. Mind where you-uns is. You ain't got no style about you."

"I don't keers. It's so awful hot. I hate the feel of my hands kivered up, anyway," and off came the "half-handers."

"It's soon to call," explained the elder girl, with a company drawl, "but I an' Polly laid off to come an' see you-uns to-day, seein' as I leave home a-Monday. I've got a place to the Springs to work out."

"Cis thinks it's hard lines on her to leave home an' work out," giggled Polly.

"Well, I don't tie to bein' at the beck an' call o' folks, but I ain't a-goin' to sweat over it. I sha'n't work a lick more'n enough to git me a outfit o' clo'es, an' then I aim to quit an' come home, licketty split. I allus were great fur home—I enjoy home wuss'n anything."

She handed Ruth a little tin lard-pail. "Maw, she sent you girls some fresh pork. You'd better un-lid the bucket, Ruth; fresh meat don't keep good lidded up tight."

Polly turned to Hermia: "You-uns is from Denver, ain't you? Do you work out?"

Hermia replied to the latter query in the negative.

"I reckoned you arned your clo'es that-a-way," with another giggle.

Cicely took a portion of Hermia's sleeve between her thumb and finger.

"What d'ye call this stuff? Jest feel of it, Polly. What did it cost, now?"

"About twelve and a half cents a yard."

"Well, I swan! I must git me a dress

like that. It's awful handsome an' awful cheap, too. Got the pattern of it?"

"No."

"What did that pin in your hair cost?"

"Really, I don't remember."

"See them rings of ourn?" said Polly, spreading out her short-fingered hand beside Cicely's to display two very brassy circlets. "Them's prize rings. Cis arned 'em sellin' tea."

And Cicely explained, with honest pride: "They give you a solid gold guaranteed ring fur every five pound of tea you sell. See the filigreed work on them? I sold ten pound of tea fur the two. If you girls would like to arn you one apiece," with animation, "I'll git the name an' address of the tea company fur you."

"Cis," broke in Polly, "when you git you a dress like Hermia's, hyur, you mustn't make it wrapper-like. You know maw don't like a wrapper on you."

"Maw says she don't never like to see a wrapper on a thick woman, it looks so slowsy," Cicely explained. "I'm sort o' thick made, an' so's maw, an' so's Polly.

Now, you're slim, an' you look good in a wrapper."

Polly laughed aloud, struck by a sudden recollection.

"Us girls took a fit o' dressin' up t'other day. I tried on maw's tea-gownd an' I went a-swishin' the tail around on the floor, an' Cis, she dressed up in my knee-dresses, jest fur devilment. Jake, he come in onexpected, an' ketched us, an' he like to deviled Cis to death over it."

"Now, Polly, what did you go to tell that on me fur? Polly, she do like to badger folks," expostulated her sister; adding, "I ain't got much to my back, now, but I'm aimin' to git me some fine clo'es right soon."

Polly tittered. "Your clo'es won't keep fine long when you an' Jake housekeep!"

"Now, Polly, don't tell *every*thing you know!"

Ruth looked up.

"Oh, there is a wedding in prospect, is there? Is it Jake Atwood?"

Cicely simpered, delighted at the turn of the conversation, and the others laughed from sympathy.

"Her an' Jake," volunteered Polly, "aim to set up in the spring. Jake's claim lays right alongside o' yourn, there, on the east side."

Conscious pride of her position vibrated in Cicely's flat, metallic tones as she took up the strain.

"I an' Jake lay off to build us a little house first, like this 'n' o' yourn. This 'n' 's big enough fur I an' Jake. We don't need no bigger house to start with. Some day we're talkin' about addin' on to it, an' buildin' us a five-room house. I want a parlor an' a dinin'-room an' two bedrooms, an' a kitchen, an' wild cucumber-vines to climb all over the porticule in front."

"It will be a fine house for Windy Creek," observed Hermia.

"Yes, I an' Jake lay off to put us up a finer house than what Rose Rooney's got her. That woman's allus braggin' high an' low over her fine house, an' I an' Jake aim to call her down."

"Don't you like Rose Rooney for a neighbor?"

"No, we don't. Maw's been a mother to

that woman, an' she's treated her so mean. We-uns jest had to drop Rose Rooney. She's talked about all of us. She's talked about me, awful. She tolt maw I weren't neat like her 'n Polly. She said I were frowsy-headed, an' she said when I were married an' had a house o' my own, I'd let it go dirty. She said I let my head go frowsy, Rose did. My sakes! Maw says I comb my head clair out o' raison! I *never* let my bangs go straight, an' maw scolds me fur combin' my head two an' three times a day. Maw says I won't have ary hair left in my head if I don't quit rakin' it so much. An' Rose, she tolt Em Post, that's her sister, that she never did see what Jake seen in me—that she didn't admire his taste. Rose, she never liked me. I wouldn't do her work fur her, I reckon that's why she's talked so about me. She use' to send over fur I an' Polly to come an' mind her children fur her or chop her wood or help her wash. I went onc't or twic't, but it were too much like bein' a servant to her, so I up an' quit. But Polly's free-hearted: she goes yit, sometimes. I ain't

never spoke to Rose sence Marky, that's her youngest, were borned. I ain't got no use fur her, an' I won't go with a woman that can't keep thur tongue off o' me. Onc't she says to maw, 'Thur ain't a girl in this country that has a decent drop o' blood in them!' An' that were jist about as bad as her sayin' I an' Polly weren't decent. Maw, she fired right up, an' she says, 'Look-a hyur, Rose, you needn't talk about ary one o' my girls! I've got some spunk, now I can tell ye!' Rose, she says, 'I weren't talkin' about none o' your girls!' But maw knowed she were meanin' I an' Polly. Rose, she's allus talkin' about people's wrongs—she's allus gassin' about how mean people is, when *she's* the mean one. She's allus meddlin' whur she ain't no business to. She went an' tolt Dr. Peffer that we was too poor to pay our doctor-bills; an' after her meddlin', Dr. Peffer quit fixin' maw's eyes: she had granite eyes. He's awful mean that-a-way, he's as clos't an' hard as he can be. Didn't you-uns see Dr. Peffer? You'd remember him if you did. He's got him a office over to Arrowhead,

an' he doctors all over Windy Crick. He's a little man, awful neat, an' he's got little bits of hands, like Ruth's. He's a awful smart doctor, if he is little. But we-uns ain't got no use fur him.

"What do you-uns think Rose said to maw, right after maw's little baby died? When maw lost her little boy, that were the first experiments she'd ever had of death. She were feelin' all broke up over it, like. Her 'n Rose was down suller, an' Rose, she says, 'It's a good thing the baby did die. You-uns is too poor to raise it.' That's jest what that woman said. Maw didn't tell me that not fur a long time. When she did tell me, I as't her why she didn't kick Rose out o' the suller; an' maw said she would, only fur havin' to kick her upstairs."

"Looky, Cis!" Polly broke in; she had left her seat. "Come an' take a look at this table over hyur. I've been a-stedyin' whur the table were at whur you-uns et, an' hyur 'tis!"

"Now, ain't that a right cute idee!" cried Cicely, jumping up to see. "I'm go-

in' to git Jake to make me a table like that in my house, sure as you're borned. Say, it don't take up no room at all when it's down, do it? An' that's the idee in a little bit of a house."

The table in question was a single leaf, swung by leathern hinges against the wall; when in use, it was propped into a horizontal position by a folding leg.

Cicely drew back the curtains.

"Looky, Polly! see how them bunks is fixed, nailed to the walls! An' corn-husk mattresses to sleep on, an' curtains hung in front. An' them nail-kegs an' trunk with calico sewed on them, an' cooshions on top, fur chairs an' a sofy. I'm a-goin' to have some jest like them."

"An' oh, ain't that a cute little stove!" cried Polly.

"You've got a lot of things inside your house, but the way thur made, an' the way thur put, they don't seem to take up no room at all," said Cicely. "You kin turn around an' walk about jest as easy! Your pa, he's an awful handy man—he's got you so many things hand-made. I aim to tell

Jake how nice your house is fixed inside, so's he kin git an idee how to fix up ourn that-a-way."

Polly turned on Hermia, suddenly. "You-uns kin keep house so nice, why don't you git married?"

"Perhaps I shall, some day."

"Oh, maw says thur ain't no chanc't fur a girl after they're eighteen. If they want to git married, they'd better hustle afore they git that old. The men's gittin' to be so pettic'lar nowadays they want a girl to be reel young, or else they won't look at them. Cis were eighteen last Christmas, an' maw tells her she only got Jake by the skin of her teeth.

"Poll's only fourteen, so she thinks she's got jest heaps o' time. But maw says she's jest cut out fur a old maid—she likes cats. How old are you?" directing her question point-blank at Hermia.

"Sixteen," smiling.

"Well, I swan!" said Cicely, in slow surprise, and Polly exclaimed, "Why, you-uns ain't old, then! Folks said you was a old maid. You look as old as Cis, anyway, an'

you act old. What number of shoe do you-uns wear?"

"Oh, sometimes one number, sometimes another!"

"How funny! I wear fours, an' Cis, she wears five and a halves."

"Polly, we-uns must be goin'," said Cicely. "It's drawin' towards milkin'-time."

"You-uns must come over an' see we-uns," said Polly.

Cicely clapped her hand to her pocket.

"Oh, I clean furgot this stuff. Maw hearn you-uns were poorly, Ruth, an' she sent over this bottle fur you to take. She seen your skin were swarty like, an' she made out it were your liver ailin' you. Folks that's got the liver complaint is allus swarty in the face."

"Your mother was very kind," murmured Ruth, turning over the bottle and eying its dark and grewsome contents. "What is it?"

"It's called *Lyman's Liver Alleviator.* Maw's took most of the bottle. It's helped her, lots. It's a patent medicine, an' it's

good fur liver-complaint, cat-arrh, and take-it."

"'Take-it!' What's that?"

"Why, when you take it inside. You pour a spoonful into a cup of water, an' you take a swig of the stuff onc't in a while till you feel better."

II

A CAMPBELLITE SERMON

The Peak, wind and weather prophet of the region, rose into a clear sky on the morning of the Sabbath set apart for immersion.

On the plain, beside a section road fenced along with barbed wire, stands the schoolhouse, the counterpart of a dozen others scattered throughout the country. A square frame building, unshaded without and bare within; desks hacked and ink-stained; rude benches placed around the walls; at the farther end, the teacher's desk for pulpit.

The blackboards bristled with autographs of the young people, and scrawled announcements such as these invited public attention:

Art has got a black eye
He looked at Jean and thats why

A Campbellite Sermon

R is sweet on D
Dance at Bunts
next Saturday Night
Come early
if you want any Vittles

There was a buzz of talking and laughter in the school-room. A strong smell of tobacco pervaded the room. Bushy-headed, horny-handed ranchmen, wearing their every-day overalls, by natural affinity collected in groups to discuss crops and cattle and weather. The younger men affected the cowboy style of dress; they were sunburned and awkward. Supremely conscious of the presence of the tittering girls, they cast sidelong glances thither; but shyness held them aloof. The women came clothed in calico, and some in gingham aprons besides; they wore sun-bonnets, which they took off in the house. In a corner near the door, the matrons displayed with conscious pride an assortment of not less than one-and-twenty lusty infants. Lullabies were hummed in two or three different keys; babies cooed and fretted. The small chil-

dren ran about with that boisterousness exhibited by the young rustic, when, its panic of fear at first sight of strangers allayed, a reaction sets in.

A sudden quiet fell on the congregation as the preacher entered the school-house door. He strode down the aisle, and laid his hat and stick on the desk. His ministerial attire was a seedy, dust-colored suit, with a sack-coat that bagged at the pockets, and slightly soiled linen; he wore neither tie nor cuffs. Mr. Crimp stood before his people, a short, thick-set man of about forty; his face and hands were red; he wore close-cut side-whiskers, and a mustache that partially concealed thin, tight lips; his shaven chin was flat, with an upward tilt; a lurking smile played about his mouth; his eyes were small, restless, and greenish-blue in color.

From right and left smiling nods greeted the pastor. A wiry little man, with face and hands fiery red, hitched up his trousers and ostentatiously crossed the room to do him honor. A huge, hairy farmer gripped him by both hands and shook them as

though he would shake them off. The first was Mr. Post; the second, Mr. Flieger, step-father to Rose Rooney. Both were on the school-board, and great men in the district.

Mr. Crimp pulled a white cotton handkerchief out of his breast-pocket, wiped his heated brow, and addressed the expectant congregation:

"We've come together this morning, good people, to witness and to participate in the most solemn ritual of the Christian Church. We've come together first to listen to a discourse which shall prepare our minds for this solemn rite; and when that's done, we'll all repair in a body to Bittern's sheep-pond, where the services has been arranged to be held, and there receive a little band of beloved penitents into the fold. When they are gethered in, dear friends, let us do everything in our power to make them appreciate their blessed privilege.

"Let us sing."

The preacher gave out a hymn, one of those compositions in which "vain repetition" supplies what is lacking in matter,

set to a jigging tune caught quickly by the popular ear:

"'Tis religion that can give,
In the light, in the light,
Sweetest pleasure while we live,
In the light of God.

Chorus:—

Let us walk in the light,
In the light, in the light,
Let us walk in the light,
In the light, the light of God."

The people sang vigorously from paper-covered hymn-books, torn, and scribbled with nonsense similar to the inscriptions on the blackboards. Mr. Crimp threw back his head and shut his eyes; he beat time with a lead-pencil, tapping his foot on the floor to mark the rhythm.

During the singing a young fellow sauntered in, late. He dropped beside two slim-waisted slips of girls who colored brightly at his coming, and made room for him on the bench. From the hand of one he wrested a broken fan tied with bits of scarlet ribbon, and gallantly plied it, rewarded

by her flashing smile, himself a mark for the resentment of more than one less audacious swain. The youth was Soph Crimp, the preacher's son. He had a town-bred air; his smile was pleasant, his eye blue and fearless; but in the son the thin lips of the father were repeated, and the sharp chin was yet more prominent.

There was a great clattering of seats; mothers hushed their children; two of the matrons lulled their babies to repose by raking their heads with fine-toothed combs; and the congregation settled down to the digestion of the sermon.

Mr. Crimp picked up a small Bible bound in black leather and laid it open on his outstretched palm, while he turned over the leaves with his other hand. Then he cleared his throat and read that portion of the eighth chapter of Acts which relates to Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. When he had finished the reading he replaced the Bible on the desk.

"I have read to you on this occasion that portion of the Scriptures that tells us how Philip baptized the Ethiopian. I want you

to take notice of the simplicity with which Philip carried out his plan of baptizing this man. He didn't wait till they come to a city with a church in it and a baptismal font and all that. No; he stopped the carriage at the very first pond they come to—and most likely it was a sheep-pond. In those days the great men, the learn'd and thinkers, kept sheep for a living; and of course it stands to reason that where there was sheep, there was ponds for washing the wool to prepare it for shearing, don't it?"

Mr. Flieger nodded his large head several times, and leaned over to whisper to his wife.

"I selected this here verse for my text. Hunt the Bible through from one end to the other and you won't find a text that's more to the point than this one:

"'*And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, See, here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized?*' *Acts* 8: 36.

"Philip believed in simplicity so far as the *means* of baptizing was concerned. But he was mighty particular about the

manner of his baptizing! Just listen to these words:

"'*And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.*'

"The eunuch was completely submerged under water. No half-way baptizing about that. Philip believed in doing the thing up brown; he believed in a genu-ine immersion. It beats me how some of these here churches that believes in sprinkling a few little drops of water on the top of your head gets around that verse. And some other verses in this book, too! I tell you what it is, my good people, I'm glad that I belong to the Christian church, and I'm glad that I understand its doctrines. I'm glad that you do, too. It's a good thing to be on the right side, ain't it?" said Mr. Crimp, with an engaging smile.

Mr. Flieger laughed aloud and a sympathetic ripple ran around the audience.

"Now, one Sunday, when I lived in the city, I didn't feel in the mood to go to my own church, and I strayed into the first big church I come to—an Episcopalian or a

Presbyterian or a Methodist—I've forgotten which it was; but it don't matter; they're all about of a piece. Now I hadn't been there long before I seen a baby whisked into the entry; then another an' then another. I tumbled: I had happened in on an infant baptizin'. Excuse *me* for callin' it baptizin': sprinklin' is more to the point. (Laughter.)

"Now, I don't know whether any of you has seen a 'sprinklin',' or not. If you haven't, I hope you never will. It's a waste of time even to look on at such a sight. You'd better be at work in your fields of a Sunday mornin', diggin' potatoes or hoein' corn, than lookin' on to see a lot of little young babies baptized, like I did. Well, a string of men and women walked in at a side door, single file, every man a-carryin' a baby in his arms, tricked out in long clothes and lace and finery, his wife a-follow'in' at his heels. They formed a half-circle round the pulpit and come to a stand-still. The preacher come down the steps, and another man come after him carryin' a silver cake-plate in his hands—I guess it

was a cake-plate, borrowed for the occasion of some lady in the congregation, most likely." (Loud and delighted laughter from Mr. Flieger, and tittering from others in the congregation.) "The preacher stopped before the first baby in the row, and its father handed him a slip of paper with the child's name wrote on it. I surmised that was the way of it. Think of it! Think of baptizing a creature that wasn't acquainted with its own name! Why, you'd do better if you was to have your cat or your dog baptized!" (Laughter.) "They have the sense to know when their name is called; but what sense has a baby got that's under six months old? I don't ask you to believe me, my good friends: it's asking too much to expect you to believe what I'm going to tell you. That infant that the preacher stopped before and took the slip of paper with its name wrote on it—that infant wasn't two months old, if it was that." (A murmur of horror ran round the room.) "When the baptizin'—no, 'sprinklin''—commenced, there was a great silence fell on the people, and everybody

leaned over and craned their necks to see. The preacher and the fathers and mothers looked as solemn as death over it. The preacher dipped the fingers of his right hand into the cake-plate, so, and shook the drops off onto the baby's forehead and wiped the top of its head with his wet hand. 'Elizabeth Mary,' said he, 'I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.' And what do you suppose happened then? Just what would naturally happen, of course. The baby cried! It screamed and hollered like all possessed, and its father had to bundle it out at a side door without waiting for the close of the ceremony.

"That little infant was wiser than the minister and all the people put together. It knew that a foolish and unnatural thing was being done to it, and it raised its little voice in protest. But that didn't bring them numskulls to reason; oh, no; they proceeded with their fruitless task, and finished it, too, although nearly every babe there raised its little voice and had to be took out. There was seven infants baptized

that day." (The congregation looked serious.)

"I left that there temple of Mammon, and come away quite roused and heated over the thought of all the foolishness that had been perpetrated since the world was created, and is being perpetrated yet, even in this civilized age. But it come over me that as I hadn't had a finger in the creation, I needn't trouble myself if things did go topsy-turvy. It would be all the same a hundred years hence. So I cooled down again.

"I thank God" (raising his eyes to the ceiling) "that my children never saw, much less partook, of the mockery of infant baptism. Through the wisdom of their natural guardians they were saved from that ordeal.

"I lost a little girl, once; she never was baptized; she went to heaven without it. Now some would think that was awful to allow an unbaptized child to die. But I'm thankful to say the water of the baptismal font never touched her. When I stood beside her little grave—she was the oldest of

my little girls, it seemed to me that I had lost the only thing I cared for on earth. I didn't care to live. I tell you the earth looked black to me; and the future looked black. But the worst moment of all come when they was filling up the grave, when the first clods of dirt fell on the coffin that held my little girl. Then it just seemed like —my heart—broke."

Mr. Crimp stopped and swallowed hard. His face reddened and a moisture suffused his eyes. The room had grown very still. Then Rose Rooney burst into noisy weeping. The women put their aprons to their eyes. Mothers pressed their infants closer to their bosoms. In a husky voice, Mr. Crimp resumed:

"It was years before I could revisit that little grave of mine again. But I felt resigned. There wasn't a moment from the first, in fact, that I didn't feel resigned. It's a blessed feeling, that feeling of resignation. But it's only a Christian that can experience it. 'He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.' Them are the most comforting words in the whole Bible, and the truest.

A lamb that's sheared is a very tender creature, you know. David couldn't have thought of a prettier comparison—the lamb shorn of its wool and the bereaved parent shorn of his child. The Sam that that's in, is my favor-ite. It was my mother's favorite too.

" I've only got to shut my eyes " (assuming a beatified expression) " and I see my little girl's pure spirit and glorified body on the shining sands, among the blessed.

" Speaking of the glorified body " (waking up suddenly to toss over the leaves of the Bible), " I refer you to the first chapter of the first book of Revelations. I want to read a few verses to you on this wonderful subject; they're appropriate on an occasion of immersion. In immersion we're cleansed from our sins, you know, and in death we're cleansed from our earthly bodies and given the glorified body. Now this is how the revelator describes one of these here glorified bodies.

" ' And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

"'His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire.

"'And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

"'And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp, two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.'"

Closing the book, Mr. Crimp laid it back on the desk and went on:

"The revelator points to the glorified body that the Christian is going to receive in the next life. It's the Universalist idea, you know, that of the glorified body. My mother's people was all Universalists, and I was raised among those kind of ideas. Why, my Cousin Carrie and I had a conversation on that very subject just the other day. It's a great pleasure to me to think that when I get to heaven, *I shall be like Jesus,* in the glorified body. That's what the Universalists believe, you know. I've got in mind another instance of the glorified body. I suppose you remember the sermon

I preached to you on the transfiggeration, when Christ stood on the mount in a transfiggered form, and Moses and Elias come and stood by him, also transfiggered? Christ's body was glorified in that vision. Now, I look at this different from most students of the Bible. It isn't generally known or thought of that this scene of the transfiggeration was *heaven,* but it was heaven, come right down and settled on the top of the mount, there; and the three disciples, Peter, James, and John, saw right into heaven. Whenever there was a glorified body descended to this earth, that was heaven right around it. And this vision of the transfiggeration, this was a typical vision. The three figgers, Moses, Elias, and Christ, these stood for three types; Moses stood for the body dead, buried, and living. Christ for the body, dead, buried, and resurrected; and Elias for the body neither dead nor buried nor yet resurrected, but living. I've sometimes thought of writing a commentary on this subject, or a treatise or something; it's a very absorbing subject to me. Here they are; the type of life and

the type of death, and the type of resurrection. The Christian is another type of the glorified body, though our earthly eyes can't see the glory of it till we get to heaven, but it's there, all the same. Now, what had the Christian ought to wear outside of him?"

As the preacher put this question, intending to answer it himself after an oratorical pause, a young man said in a stage whisper, "Clothes!" and looked around for approval. But no one laughed. Mr. Post turned full about in his seat and transfixed the offender with a frowning eye. Mr. Crimp, ignoring the interruption, proceeded:

"Did you notice in the verses I read, the revelator speaks of the vision as clothed from head to foot? Yes, his feet and even his hands was covered. And you know that the high-priest in the sanctuary was always clothed from head to foot, likewise. Well, the garment that was wore by the high-priest stood for what the Christian had ought to be covered with now—the garment of the life of Christ. The outside of him had ought to be covered with this

garment from head to foot, if he is a Christian. The inside of the Christian sometimes gets contrary" (with a knowing smile), "but the *outside* must be all right. The first duty of the Christian is to set a good example, and he can't do it without the garment that I speak of.

"It takes a scholar to get into the truths of the Book of Revelations." (With unction.) "These college professors go deep into the subject. There was two of them, friends of mine, that used to pore over it half the night, and teach school all next day, besides. It's the great thinkers that read this book.

"In the fourteenth verse it speaks of the white wool on the top of the head; don't that point to the white hairs of old age? Scientists have discovered that deep thinkers get gray early in life; and don't it take a deep thinker to understand the Book of Revelations? I've noticed that it's the old, gray-headed men that take pleasure in reading the Book of Revelations. My grandfather used to pore over it; he was raised a Quaker. When I was a little

codger, so high, I used to love to listen to my grandfather read from Revelations; and it's always had greater attractions for me than any other book in the Bible—I guess that's the reason why my hair is gettin' gray. I guess I'll leave it get gray—I won't dye it."

Mr. Crimp facetiously ran his fingers through the grayish stubble on his compact head, and the congregation laughed. That his audience was entirely sympathetic, went far toward proving Mr. Crimp's merit as a preacher: it listened attentively, it responded quickly to his changes of mood, it always laughed in the right place.

"I've always been thankful that I was born with a logical mind," said Mr. Crimp. The audience gushed its approval. "It's a pleasure to be able to sum up your points and have a reason for everything at your tongue's end. It ain't everybody that's gifted that way. But logic kind of runs in our family. I get it from my mother's side of the house. Pa was a pretty smart man to talk to, in his young days, but he wasn't brainy, like my mother. Some have said to

me that I missed my vocation when I took up with preachin'—I had ought to 'a' been a lawyer. I don't think so. I might have made a pretty good livin' at the law; there's no doubt but what I could: but the field wasn't wide enough for me. No; I chose the ups and downs of the preacher's life; and beyond and above that, I struck out into country districts, where my talents could have free play. I wasn't to be bound down by the laws and regulations of no city church. Perhaps some of you good people here don't know I refused a five-thousand-dollar salary as pastor of the first Christian church that was erected in the Springs, so's I could accept a call to Windy Crick."

Mr. Flieger turned himself about and nodded at the audience with triumph in his eye.

"It's been a life-long habit of mine to keep a lookout for causes of failure. I've often profited by others' mistakes by studyin' how they might have prevented 'em, and then followin' out that principle myself. So, as a student of the Bible, it's a favor-ite pastime of mine to search the Scriptures

for the cause of this apostle's failure or that apostle's failure. As I'm one of the called, I reason that I've got as good a right to study how to promote the Gospel as one of these here apostles: and if I can learn anything from their blunders, I'll do it.

"In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul goes to Greece to preach to the people of that country, you know. The inhabitants was Pagans: that is, they believed in gods and goddesses. They worshipped Jupiter and Venus and Mercury and Plato and two or three hundred others of them fancy beings. Jupiter was the God of Thunder, Mercury was the God of Lightning, Venus the Goddess of Beauty, and Cupid the God of Love" (there was a titter from the young people), "and Plato, he guarded the gates of Hell—like Peter at the gate of Heaven, only Peter's got a cooler situation." (Laughter.) "All these was imaginary gods. It must have took a lot of imagination to think up all these here gods and goddesses, but the Greeks has always been chock full of that commodity. That's where I get my vein of imagination. The

Greeks was a noble race. For all their idolatrousness, they was far more civilized than people is now, and powerful, rich, and handsome, besides. The proudest moment of my life is when I remember that I was born a Greek. On my mother's side of the house, there's as pure a streak of Grecian blood as you could find anywheres. My mother was a noble woman; she bore the pure Greek name of Helen. Her grandfather, my great-grandfather, sailed direct from A-thens in the early part of this century. His given name was Sophocles, which name has been the proud inheritance of most of the male descendants in our family. It was give to me by my grandfather, and I give it to my only son, there. Did you ever hear that old fable where an assembly of all the animals mocked at the lion because he had only one whelp, and the lion says: '*One,* but a *lion!*' Well, that's about the way I always felt about my having got only the one boy; and I have a way of saying: '*One,* but a *Crimp!*' The Crimps always had plenty of family pride. The name of Sophocles come from Sophocles,

the Greek poet and playwright. There's a story that our family is descended direct from old Sophocles, himself. I can't say how true it is, but it's a pleasant thing to contemplate. Did you ever stop to think what an attractive place heaven must be, peopled, as it were, by all the great men of the world that we read about, counting away back to old Adam's time? Why, when I get to thinking about it, I can't hardly contain myself till I get to heaven and get to walk the streets with those old philosophers of the Grecian race—whose blood flows in my veins—and converse with them on familiar, every-day topics. What a privilege! what a blessed privilege!

"Perhaps you've noticed that I pronounce the name of the town where Paul went to, *A-thens*. That's the way the Greeks pronounce the name of their town. I intend to stick by it, as I certainly have a right to, bein' of Greek extraction, though it ain't generally given that pronunciation in this country.

"I started out to tell you about Paul, and strayed from my subject, as I always do

when I get to talking about the country of my ancestors. Paul, as you'll notice if you'll read the Book of Acts, had went to Greece on a preaching tour. He visited Thessalonica, which was a town some'eres in the north of Greece, and then he went to A-thens. When Paul saw the idolatrousness of the people in that city, he was fired with a spirit of righteous wrath. He expostulated with them, and stirred up resentment against himself, and so lost his popularity. He wasn't politic enough. A certain amount of policy, now, is as necessary in religion as it is in business" (wrinkling his brow into a smile). "That's one of my fads; and it's a pretty good fad, too. Then the Epicureans and the Stoics, they went for him, and asked him questions, just to get into an argument with him and mix him up. Those old Greeks was always up to that—so brainy. You couldn't find a race on the face of the earth that was fonder of an argument. The Epicureans was the kind of philosopher that was particular about their eating. They spent eleven hours at the table, nine in bed, and four at

the bath. They never eat anything that was stale or inferior, and they never looked at an article of food unless it cost a pretty sum of money. They never touched a thing on their table unless the servant had washed his hands seven times afore he had touched it. In consequence of all these finicky ways of theirs, they never contracted either gout or dyspepsia, and they was as long-lived as the best of 'em. Their name 'Epicurean' come from a Greek word meaning 'eat'; notice how the letter 'e' is the only letter left of the root to tell us where our word 'eat' is derived from. The name 'Stoic' come from a Greek word meaning 'stone.'"

Mr. Crimp stepped to the blackboard and wrote with flourishing chalk:

ἵστημι—to stay, stand still.
ἵστω—a stone.
στόικ—stoic.

"Our word 'stone' is derived from all three of them words. And the Stoics was them stony-hearted kind that didn't believe in showing any feeling or emotion. They never let on that they cared when any of

their relations died. It would be mighty convenient, wouldn't it, to be that kind of a philosopher when your mother-in-law died, because no one would expect you to shed tears?" (Laughter.) "But the Stoics have gone out of fashion. They never laughed at a joke, neither. They was descended from the Spartans.

"Well, Paul, he kep' on, arguing and expostulating, until, first thing he knew, the place got too hot for him. If he hadn't a' left when he did, he would 'a' been fired out of the town. The only converts he made was a man and a lady, and a few others not named—not enough to shake a stick at. There was nothing for it but for Paul to own up that his revival had been a failure. He as much as owned it, too, when he said he'd had enough of the Greeks: he'd shake off their dust, and go to the Gentiles.

"I fancy Paul learnt something from his failure in A-thens. In the other towns that he put up at, he used more policy, and you'll notice, if you read your Bible, he got to be quite a popular fellow in time. But he clumb a tree when he went to A-thens.

"Now, what was Paul's failure in A-thens due to? Paul's failure in A-thens was due to his *neglect of the ordinance of baptism!*" (Mr. Flieger cast an inexpressible look over his shoulder.) "If you read this chapter when you go home—it's the seventeenth chapter of the Book of Acts—you won't find a word about baptism in the whole of Paul's sojourn in A-thens. I guess he got tired of taking so much trouble with his converts, or mebbe he tried to slip out of work by sprinklin' a few drops of water out of a silver cake-plate onto the tops of their heads." (Laughter.) "At any rate, a slip-shod ministry like that didn't work, and it was the cause of his failure. He didn't tumble to it at first; but I fancy he did afterwards, because I notice he give more immersions at the other places he went to. Paul had his trip to A-thens for nothing. If he had took this man and this lady out to the sea, or out into some pond of water, and baptized them before all the people, Paul would 'a' had more applicants for baptism on the spot than he could handle. He'd have had to hire an assistant. He'd

have touched the people's hearts. They couldn't 'a' stood by and looked on at that solemn rite with hardened hearts. It wouldn't 'a' been in nature. I tell you, I've sometimes wished that I'd 'a' lived in those times. I wouldn't have let Paul go out of A-thens without giving him a pointer or two. The trouble with Paul was, he didn't understand human nature. More than that, he didn't understand himself. *Γνῶθι σεαυτόν* so the Greeks say. That means, 'Know thyself.' Paul was fond of telling others to know themselves, but he didn't know himself, not by a jugful. Perhaps Paul got a little rattled while he was at A-thens, on account of his sore eyes. We mustn't be too hard on him. You know, Paul speaks of his 'thorn in the flesh' that he was afflicted with; the thorn he had reference to was his sore eyes. Perhaps you didn't know that Paul never pretended to write his epistles himself; he couldn't half see; he hired an amanuensis.

"Some bring up as an argument against immersion that Peter couldn't have baptized three thousand souls in a single day, as he

is said to have done some'eres in Acts. They say Peter must have sprinkled 'em. These skeptics seem to have an idea that it takes time to immerse. Well, so it does, if you have a small crowd and stop to do up all the ceremonials. Anything takes time if you string it out. But it can be done quick, and I can prove it. I know of one immersion that was put through in double-quick time. When I conducted that revival down at Kiawa, the converts come so thick and fast that I got to be quite an expert—soused 'em at the rate of three per minute." (Laughter.)

"Before I close I mean to give you in Greek what the eunuch said to Philip and what Philip answered. As Greek was the tongue they spoke, and the tongue that the New Testament was wrote in before it was translated, you can form an idea of their conversation as they rode along in the carriage together. It'll bring the scene home to you.

"When they come to the pool of water, the eunuch said, '*Idoo hoodoar; tie kolooaye me baptisthayneye?*' which is, trans-

lated, 'Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?'

"And Philip answered, '*Aye pitzooice eks hollace tace kardiass eksetzin.*' And the translation of that is, 'If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.'

"When I was at college, I learnt the Greek language; it's a noble tongue. It's been a great lift to me in my study of the Bible.

"Well! we've got a long ride before us to Bittern's sheep-pond, and I must cut my sermon short, or some of us'll be wantin' our dinner. The subject of immersion is a deep one, a profound one, and I only regret that lack of time prevents me from doing justice to it. I'll ask you, my good friends, to accompany myself and these converts at the close of the services, to Bittern's sheep-pond, where the solemn rite of immersion will be performed without delay. I think it'll be most direct for us to go in a body across the school section. Some of you men c'n let down the wires at the furthest corner, so's we c'n drive straight across to the pond without going around by the road."

The congregation stirred; the rustle and flutter that follows the closing of an address broke in on the quiet of the room.

Mr. Crimp slightly inclined his head and closed his eyes.

"Great God," he said, in calm and equable tones, "we thank Thee for the converts that have been brought into the fold through the preaching of Thy servant and apostle. We thank Thee that Thou hast preserved them from the wiles of other sects, blinded by conceit and ignorance, and teaching foolishness to their followers. Bless this little flock of converts; keep them in the paths of righteousness; bless their families. We thank Thee for the fair weather that Thou hast sanctified this occasion with. Attend us to the scene of immersion, and consecrate the sacred rite to these children in the faith; re-consecrate us older members of Thy great and blessed family. We ask it in Thy name. Amen and amen."

Mr. Crimp reached out for the hymn-book on the desk, but delayed opening it. A smile played about his mouth and brought

out the crows'-feet around the corners of his eyes.

"Perhaps you wonder why I repeat the word 'amen' twice. I don't mind enlightening you. I generally have a reason for everything I do, and I have a reason for this. Now, the ancient Hebrew meaning of the word 'amen' was 'So help me God.' The Greeks render it 'So do Thou protect me and mine'; while the Saxon cuts off the original meaning and leaves it plain 'So be it,' besides making it one of the shortest words in our language. I feel the importance of this little word to be weightier than most ministers and students of the Bible do, and I think I better the expression and render it more important by making a repetition of the word: 'Amen and amen.'"

III

THE IMMERSION

A general scramble followed the benediction. Men hurried to get out their teams. Women seized the opportunity to exchange items of gossip while jamming little sunbonnets over babies' faces. Near the door, the young people drifted together; red, embarrassed youths, twirling their sombreros in their hands; girls smiling and self-conscious. Three or four young men clustered about the pretty sisters at Soph Crimp's side. These girls with flower-like faces, so slenderly formed, were as unlike as could be to the buxom variety of damsel abounding on Windy Creek. They were pictures; the one in red calico and ribbons, the other in blue. One was wild as a gypsy; a gentle dignity, inborn, marked the other. To the boys their easy, taking manners were irresistible. But in spite of masculine attention,

the two strangers of their own sex were remembered, and the sisters came up smiling to shake hands. Ruth Wood introduced them to her cousin as Diantha and Estelle Bittern.

"You girls must come over. I and Stelle 'd be right glad to have you come out and spend the day," said Diantha; she had the soft negro tones of the "way-down" Southerner. She looked down at Ruth from her queenly height. "You're lookin' right peart-like, Ruth; I 'low you'll git well if you stay out chur long."

"And how well you are looking, Diantha!"

Ruth's tone of admiration deepened the pink color in the girl's cheek, but she replied, deprecatingly: "I'm jest toler'ble. I don't look it in the face, but I'm consider'ble porer than what I was last chur."

"Are you going to be immersed to-day?" asked Ruth.

"No, but my two married sisters aim to be, and my brother-in-law, Viny's husband, if he don't git scairt out o' the notion. Viny's been sayin' she darsn't trust Joel

out of her sight, she's that feared he'll back out. Ever sence he was converted she's had to keep bolsterin' him up, like. Come over, and I'll make you acquainted with my sisters."

Diantha's two sisters had married brothers, who, beyond the family name of Milligan, had obviously had little else in the way of worldly goods to endow the women of their choice. Three fretful babies clung to the skirts of Malvina, whose fading youth and jaded looks were due to her heavy burden of work and want and care. Maggie, having passed but two mile-stones since her bridal day, was not yet come to her sister's stage of nervous exhaustion; but already her feverish color and worried eye told whither she was bound. Life is hard on the women of Windy Creek, and youth is transient.

While Hermia chatted easily with the married sisters, and noticed the babies, Diantha was taking in the stranger; she presently whispered to Ruth, who had much ado to keep a straight face, that her cousin was awful nice—she was quite a rowdy, wasn't she?

They spoke of the afternoon's ceremony.

"Wish't you and Dianthy had got converted last Sunday, so's you could be baptized 'long of us," said Maggie.

"Sha'n't risk my life bein' ducked in no sheep-pond!" flashed Estelle. She had nothing to say for herself, but when spoken to, her words came out like explosives; her voice was hoarse, not soft like Diantha's; she twisted and untwisted her little brown fingers, her eyes danced, and color and dimples flew into her speaking face.

Mr. Crimp, shaking hands to right and left, shouldered his way into the circle.

"Them are awful bad girls! Been a-tryin' to bring 'em into the church these five months, and still they keep a-hangin' back. Encouragin' to a minister of the gospel, ain't it? Afraid of the water, eh?"

The preacher brought his pastoral speech to a close by pulling a lock of Diantha's hair and chucking Estelle under the chin.

Estelle laughed out with pleasure.

Mr. Crimp, gracefully presented by Diantha, extended a hand to each of the strangers, treating them to a bold gaze.

A great red hand descended over Ruth's shoulder, and above it the whiskered countenance of Mr. Flieger beamed like the setting sun out of a cloud.

"Have to come out to the plains to hear a sermon like that, don't ye? We never knowed what preachin' was till Brother Crimp come out here. He don't preach every-day sermons, Brother Crimp don't—he's college-l'arn'd."

Rose Rooney went quietly out, leading her children by the hand, and taking no notice of the crowd of neighbors. Her eye gleamed with a strange excitement.

Soon an odd procession wended its way across the school section, bound for Bittern's sheep-pond. The country people rode in any fashion, some in farm wagons, some in spring wagons, and some in two-wheeled carts.

Joel Milligan piled his wife and little ones into an old buggy drawn by a mule. The Flieger's surrey, packed to overflowing with the women and children of the family, lent an air of gentility to the cavalcade: run-down, rusty, dilapidated, sprinkled with

dust and powdered with mud, it was a two-seated carriage for all that. And in and out circled the young men, sitting erect on broncos, vicious or brow-beaten, according to the manner of their breaking-in.

The day was intensely still: not a breath of wind stirred the stratum of warm air enveloping the earth; heat-waves rippled at the horizon. Over head all was azure blue, under foot all tawny yellow. From the feet of the horses far out to the limit of vision the prairies stretched, a harmony in yellow; the same color even climbed for a space beyond the horizon, for a golden haze obscured the line where prairie ended and sky began, and mellowed the mountains lying far removed with outlines lost and tints pale and indistinct. Far off on the bluffs they saw a United States signal, the staff marking the geodetic survey that follows the curve of the thirty-ninth parallel from coast to coast, a work begun fifty years since, and now nearing its completion. Looking eastward, the plain seemed to tremble, and lo, earth was melting into sky, and liquid sky stealing downward into earth, taking to it-

self the form of a broad river, its blue waters undulating in the sun. They called to one another to look, and pointed. But even as they gazed, the phantom river receded, and the earth closed up its gap, and the mirage faded from their sight.

The prairie was bleached, the thread-and-needle and all manner of grasses cured by sun and wind. The grama grass grew knee-high; its slender stems topped with seed-bearing combs looked oddly like a colony of music-rests settled on the close-curled tufts below. There was neither cactus nor sage-brush, but the tumble-weed flourished apace. The yucca plant encircled its tall flower-spikes, now gone to seed, with a frill of formidable needles of a dusty green. Sunflowers yellowed the prairie. Indian paint-brushes flamed on the hillside. Close to the ground clustered the purple blooms of the deadly loco.

A myriad of insects buzzed; a ground-squirrel chirrupped; prairie-dogs waddled and barked. Little birds of a dull-black hue, with white spots on their wings, poised themselves in the air and sang, and sank to

rise again. An occasional cotton-tail darted from its burrow and scurried away. Along a gentle rise a jack-rabbit loped, bounding from the ground in long, regular leaps. Tiny speckled lizards shot across their path. Black and gray spiders leaped to their dens, great gauzy webs spun across holes in the ground.

At the farther corner of the school section the men drew the staples and lowered the wires, that the teams might pass over. Descending the slope, the party followed the windings of a narrow ravine, with a stream trickling along the rift at the bottom; and they presently came to a shallow bowl of clear water. Recent floods had washed the pool, leaving its banks ragged and steep, and baring the twisted roots of a stunted growth of cotton-woods that had sprung into life along its sides. The eye, fatigued by stretches of treeless prairie, found relief in the slight shade flickering on the bank and in the water below.

Ruth and Hermia sought the shelter of the trees on the edge, and, looking down, wondered if this pool resembled the " cer-

tain water" where, ages ago, the Ethiopian had been baptized.

In awed silence the people gathered around; they spoke in whispers, or in low-toned murmurs; even the children were quiet; the men uncovered. The Flieger family formed a group on the edge of the pool, and beyond them were Malvina and Maggie Milligan with their husbands and children. Malvina nodded back reassuringly to her husband, who was seen to be a small man with a miserably anxious look and a restless eye. His eldest had him by the hand—a delicate, stunted boy, whose face reproduced in miniature the worried expression of the parent.

Mr. Crimp pulled Mr. Flieger aside; the two held a whispered consultation. Mr. Crimp's trousers were tucked into his boots, and he wore his hat a little on one side; he appeared highly elated by the prospect before him. In his hand he held a paper, and from this he read in a loud voice, stepping forward to command attention:

"Rose Rooney, aged nineteen years, converted to the Christian faith and accepted

the doctrines of the Christian Church August 12, 1894.

"Joel Milligan, aged thirty-three years, converted August 26, 1894.

"Elnora Malvina Milligan, aged twenty-four years, converted August 26, 1894.

"Margaret Janet Milligan, aged twenty-one years, converted August 26, 1894."

The preacher placed his hat on the bank, and waded out into the pool, cautiously feeling for a level bottom. "Rose Rooney," he called loudly, beckoning with his hands.

Without a moment's hesitation, Rose Rooney pulled off her sun-bonnet and tossed it to her mother. The ruddy color had died out of her cheeks. The scanty folds of her gray gown clung to her tall form, showing its crude but artistic outlines like a sculptured figure half chiselled. She clasped the preacher's outstretched hands and stepped into the water beside him: she stood waist-deep; a shiver ran through her frame; her eyes were wide open and frightened, like a child's.

Her two little children crept close to the

edge, breathless with curiosity, staring round-eyed, with lips apart.

Their mother saw neither them nor the crowd on the bank. After the first shock of the water, a rapt and dreamy look had come into her eyes. She was alone; visionary ideas of salvation and of another world whose boundaries the rite of immersion was to gain for her filled her childish soul to the oblivion of all else.

The preacher, raising his hands heavenward, repeated a prayer.

The people bowed their heads.

"Great God, sanctify this water to the mystical washing away of this woman's sinful affections. Grant that this water may give her power to triumph over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Grant that the Old Adam in this woman may be buried."

Mr. Crimp's version of the baptismal service appeared to be adapted from the Episcopal form, with such revisions as he saw fit to make. He evidently trusted to the chance that his parishioners would not know the difference.

A convulsion broke over the features of

the convert; she clasped her rough hands before her face, and trembled and cried; her attitude was that of a penitent. Did she grasp the meaning of the vows she was about to take, or was she wrought to the pitch of nervous excitement by an awe-inspiring ceremony?

Her agitation thrilled the people. The women broke into sobs. Mrs. Flieger wept aloud, and her husband groaned, while tears forced themselves underneath his closed eye-lids and coursed down his cheeks. Even Ruth and Hermia Wood succumbed to the passing thrill of emotion.

The preacher attempted to draw away Rose Rooney's hands, but, as if in terror, she persisted in hiding her eyes. He then placed his hands on her shoulders, and in resonant tones reciting the baptismal form, he drew her backward until the water bubbled over her face and hair.

"Buried with Christ in baptism, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I baptize thee."

The convert reappeared on the surface, drenched, gasping for breath, her lips pur-

ple, her chest and shoulders heaving. She turned in a bewildered way to the bank. Some one struck up a familiar chorus, and the people lifted their voices and sang,

"Pull for the shore, sailor, pull for the shore;
Heed not the rolling waves, but bend to the oar;
Safe in the life-boat, sailor, cling to self nd more;
Leave the poor old stranded wreck, and pull for the shore."

Rose Rooney climbed shivering out of the water. Her step-father sprang to aid her; his kindly features wore an expression of deep concern; he threw a heavy woollen shawl over her shoulders, and hurried her into the carriage.

"Next! Joel Milligan!" shouted Mr. Crimp.

No one responded to the call. The people on the bank turned around and looked at the people behind them; and they in their turn stared at those in the rear. There was a confused whispering and nudging. Mr. Post sternly elbowed his way through the crowd until he confronted the scared face of Malvina Milligan.

"Where's that man o' yourn?"

"I d'n know; I 'lowed he was hyur; I can't think whur he's took hisself."

"Ain't he about?" demanded Mr. Crimp, from the middle of the pool, and several voices replied, "No, he ain't."

Jimmy Rooney thrust himself into the midst of the excited crowd. He was a blue-eyed boy of three years; his hat, in close imitation of Mr. Crimp's, was stuck on the side of his head; and his sturdy little figure bristled with importance.

"I seen him! I seen Joel Milligan!"

An interested audience collected.

"Where'd he go to? Where's he at?"

Jimmy jerked his thumb in the direction of the Milligan claim.

"Over yonder! I seen him kitin' acros't the prairie! He jist hit the road!"

The spell was broken; the people parted into knots of twos and threes; everybody talked aloud at once. In the midst of the confusion, Malvina Milligan lifted her children into the aged family buggy, and jumped in after them. Several voices called to detain her. She shouted back her inten-

tion of finding and restoring her truant husband, slapped the old mule with the reins, and ambled away; she was soon beyond recall.

Thus it befell that the only remaining candidate for baptism was Maggie Milligan; but, upon being importuned to come forth and enter the water, she, too, hung back, and refused to be baptized without her sister. Not even when Mr. Crimp himself clambered up the bank, and desired her to remember her vows, and attempt to lead her down into the water, did she reverse her decision, but stood stubbornly silent, with burning cheeks and tears dropping from her eyes.

Mr. Crimp sat down on the bank. He looked considerably less elated than half an hour since. He seemed quite out of humor from the way he slapped the water out of his boots and thrashed his wet trousers. But the fear of losing his popularity soon made him think better of his pettishness; and he once more mingled familiarly with his congregation, contenting himself with indulging in little pleasantries at the expense of his faint-hearted converts.

"'Tain't very pleasant to get your breeches wet for one convert! But a minister has got to expect such things," said Mr. Crimp.

Neither Joel Milligan nor his wife Malvina reappeared on the scene, and the people, grown tired of waiting, dispersed, leaving the valley and the lonely ravine and the quiet pool that continually emptied its waters into the sluggish little stream. And all the little animals came out of their holes and ran about in the golden sunshine. And the myriad inhabitants of the prairie went on with their simple existence, untroubled by the illusions and the emotions and the exaltations of their human neighbors who came to visit the pool.

IV

SPENDING THE DAY

Confusion reigned among the elements in the days that followed the immersion at Bittern's sheep-pond. Rising in the middle of the morning, with a frolic among the tumble-weeds and now and then a puff of sand in the eyes; gathering in fury as the day advanced, obscuring with a smoke-gray haze mountains and sky, and thickening the air with a fine brown dust; falling at dark to leave a ghostly stillness in its wake; in violent gusts in the night-time often renewing its spent forces: so, every day and all day long, blew the wind on Windy Creek. Monotony wrapped the plains: always the same blurring of roads and fences, horizon and mountains, always the dim figures of patient cattle standing motionless, their backs to the wind.

One who has for many days at a time witnessed such a sullying of the landscape, felt the rocking of the frail structure that shelters him, listened to the wild shrieking of the wind around the corner, its demoniac wailing down the stove-pipe, and its dismal moaning within the building paper, can imagine nothing drearier:—it is then that the mind reverts to the old geography at school, and dwells upon the lesson of that waste-land known as the Great American Desert.

A morning of quiet came at last, and Ruth and Hermia Wood crossed the fields to Rose Rooney's to spend the day. The naked spots between the grass tufts were swept clean of every grain of sand as though by a ruthless broom. Brushed by their skirts, the dried flower-heads and weeds and blades of grass shook off little showers of dust. But the air was fresh and cool, and a great silence had fallen over the plains.

Pete Rooney's house, a three-roomed cottage painted lead-color and garnished with a front piazza and a brick chimney, was

more pretentious than any other of the settler's homes on Windy Creek. But it lacked the home-like air possessed by some of its humblest neighbors. Two or three broken window-panes were stuffed out with pillows, the yard was rooted up into unsightly rifts and hollows by the busy snouts of half a dozen little pigs; cows and calves and colts stood about in the shade close under the house; and, worse than all, there was no front gate.

There was nothing for it but to crawl under the barbed-wire fence, and while so doing tear several three-cornered rents in their clothing. Taddy, playing on the piazza, espied them in the act. He fled into the house, and a moment later the doorway framed Rose Rooney's spirited face with Taddy peeping around her skirts.

"Hello, girls! How's you? Come right in. I declare, I'm powerful glad to see some comp'ny agin! It's dreadful lonesome stayin' here with jist the kids! Ain't the wind blowed awful? Set down, Hermia! Take your things off, girls, an' don't mind me fur keepin' on with my work. Jimmy!

You take that truck out o' here! Ain't you 'shamed, cuttin' up 'taters all over my clean floor?"

The floors, still damp from scrubbing, were littered with the children's clothing and bits of raw potato. The week's washing was heaped on one bed, and on the other the visitors laid their wraps.

Jimmy threw a scrap or two out of the door and looked at his mother with an elfish grin to see if her command were to be taken literally. But she rattled on in loud, animated tones:

"I ain't red up my house, girls, but you'll have to take me as you find me! You know how 'tis with housework—things won't stay put! 'F I don't let the work slide sometimes an' git something slapped together, them young-uns of mine 'ud go naked. There ain't nobody but me to 'tend to 'em. I says to Pete at breakfast, 'This 's the day fur them Woodses to come over, an' I'm up to my eyes in work. I sha'n't straighten up *too* slick fur 'em! They'll have to take me as they find me!' Them's the very words I says. An' Pete, he says,

'That's gener'ly the way you do let folks do, ain't it?' Ha, ha, ha!"

She laughed merrily.

His first shyness abated, Taddy began to fret and whine. His curly hair was rubbed into a mop and he had pursed his red lips into an ugly pout.

"What's the matter with Taddy this morning?" asked Ruth.

"Oh, he had the colic last night, awful, an' he's been a-fussin' all the mornin'. I never see sich a young-un'. I give that child sixteen nutmegs mashed an' boiled in milk sence day before yisterday mornin'. But it didn't seem to do him no good. I got out o' nutmegs an' sent over to your ma's an' to Bunt's fur some more, but they didn't neither one of 'em have none, so I begun on the paregoric. Paregoric's the only stuff that does that young-un any good. I've used twic't the bottles on him that I used on my other young-uns!"

"Come over and see me, Taddy," coaxed Ruth, holding out her hands. But he clung the more closely to his mother.

"Go to Ruth, Taddy, you little bother!"

cried Rose, pushing him aside and snatching up a child's half-finished gingham waist. "Ma's busy. You go to Ruth. She ain't got nothin' to do. She's got time an' to spare fur kids like you!"

Hermia asked, mildly, "I suppose you have a great deal to do, Mrs. Rooney?" and was answered with asperity:

"Oh, land, yes! Why, I don't never git time to turn around—what with cookin' fur the men, an' 'tendin' to the kids, an' reddin' up the house, an' sloppin' the pigs, an' milkin'—Pete never milks; he ain't got no time—Lord knows I ain't, neither; but I have to do it, all the same. Them young-uns is most naked fur clothes, an' when I do git anything made, they bust it out in a week's time. My young-uns is most awful hard on their clothes. Jimmy's the worst, the little rascal! You girls"—drawing her eyes together—"had ought to git married an' have your men take up claims out here! You'd have to git a hustle on you then! You'd find they was something else to do on a claim 'sides fixin' yourselves up an' lookin' at other people work! I c'n brush

up a feller apiece fur you if you want one," she added.

A crowing sound called Rose Rooney into the bedroom, whence she was heard pouring forth a stream of baby-talk. She proudly exhibited her youngest, trundling him out in a rickety carriage; she cuddled him in her arms; then, without ceremony, deposited the infant in Hermia's lap and stepped back to watch the effect.

"Like children, do you?"

"Pretty well."

She burst into a scream of delighted laughter.

"Hermia don't handle that young-un like she was used to baby-tendin'. She acts like she was afraid of him—an' she's got him wrong end foremost! I bet you ain't got no little brothers or sisters to your house."

"No. My youngest brother"—Ruth nudged her cousin, but too late—"is over sixteen."

"You're older'n your brother, ain't you?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Is Mr. Crimp going to preach next Sunday?" Ruth asked, hurriedly.

"Guess so; ain't heard nothin' to the contrary. How old *are* you, anyway, Hermia?"

Hermia laughed. "I believe Ruth and I are twins, aren't we, Ruth?"

"Ruth won't never tell me her age. Guess she's gittin' too old to tell her age."

Rose bit off her thread, glancing inquisitively first at Ruth, then at Hermia; seeing that the desired information was not forthcoming, she tossed her head.

"Oh, I ain't cur'ous! It don't make no difference to me how old you girls is, nor how young, neither! I ain't ashamed to tell my age! I was nineteen the fourth of last March.

"Ruth's so much prouder'n her ma," she went on, in an injured tone. "Her ma'll tell me anything I ast her. Her ma ain't a bit proud!"

Mrs. Rooney's gaze became riveted on Hermia's hair.

"You don't seem to have as much hair on your head as you did the last time I seen

you. Do you wear a switch when you're dressed up?" She left her seat and walked around her guest to get a view from all sides. Hermia endeavored to preserve a placid exterior. "You've got hair like my sister Lympy's. Hern is awful thin an' scraggly; it ain't got no life to it. An' yourn is the same brown color as hern. Jist see how much I've got! Queer how some folks has it all an' others ain't got anything, hardly! I've got enough an' to spare fur two. When I go to comb my head, I can't hardly run the teeth through it, it's so thick, an' I c'n set on it, too!"

Mrs. Rooney paused, waiting for remark, but as none came, she returned to the attack.

"Like livin' on your claim? Why don't you take up land out here too, Hermia?"

Hermia replied that she had no fondness for roughing it.

"But you could take up land if you wanted to, couldn't you?"

Hermia perceived the drift of Mrs. Rooney's remarks in time to reply, "I am afraid I might be considered too youthful."

Rose Rooney dropped her sewing and ran

out on the piazza, where she stood gazing up the road, shading her eyes with her hand.

"Something has happened to ruffle her," whispered Ruth, and Hermia whispered back, "Let's go home as soon as we can get away, after dinner."

Their hostess rushed into the kitchen. She assailed stove-lids, kettle, and frying-pan, shouting out of the din:

"Blest if it ain't time to be gittin' dinner! We ain't got no way to tell time—the children was playin' with the clock yisterday an' broke it, I guess. I only knowed it was drawin' toward dinner time when I see the smoke from your ma's stove-pipe! You c'n see the smoke jist as plain from our porch! An' I c'n see your ma's washin' on the line, when I stand on tip-toe. That porch 's awful handy. Had an awful big wash this week, didn't you? I never see sich folks fur wearin' light dresses! I won't never wear 'em—they git dirty too quick! Didn't you never see the smoke from *our* chimney when you're over to your ma's?"

"I've never noticed it."

"Where's your eyes?" said Jimmy, pertly. "When I'm over to your ma's I c'n see the smoke comin' out of *our* chimbley. Ourn's a brick chimbley; yourn ain't."

Mrs. Rooney winked.

"Jist listen to the young-un! He's growin' smarter 'n sassier every day of his life! He's most caught up to his ma!"

Jimmy, flattered by her allusion to his wit, lolled out his tongue and kicked up his heels on the floor.

"You git up off that floor an' quit tryin' to act smart, you little skeesics, you!" cried the mother. "You clear out an' rustle me in some wood fur dinner! Go 'long, now! Quick!"

Jimmy's countenance fell. "Don't want to," he grumbled.

"Jimmy Rooney! I'll whip you if you don't git me that wood!"

"Oh, you don't want no wood! That box's half full, now."

"There ain't enough there to burn two minutes! You go chop up that dry-goods box out there."

"Daddy wants that box. I see myself choppin' up that box."

"What do I care fur daddy. That box's none of hisn!"

During this angry controversy Rose Rooney strode to the door as Jimmy edged out of it.

"Well, I won't touch that box!" was Jimmy's parting shot from the vicinity of the wood-pile.

Rose gave a short laugh.

"Sich young-uns as I've got! I have to draw a tight line over him, now, I tell you —he's a case! Don't you wish you was me, girls?"

She bustled about in the kitchen, clattering pans and kettles. She wore no apron; the front of her blue cotton gown was dark with grease-spots and soot from the charred pitch-pine. But in her seeming disorder there was system; in a short time the dinner was on, and the appetizing odors from the kitchen excited the children, who hung clamoring about the table. She pared a raw potato for each and at these they contentedly munched. She threw down flour-

board and rolling-pin and bared her pugilistic arms to the shoulder; her wrists were firmly rounded, her hands large and well shaped. She looked like a Hebe making the pies. With the rolling-pin she whacked and pounded the paste into shape, from time to time throwing her voice, raised to a cheerful shout, into the next room or roughening it to scold the children. She pinched off bits of the raw pie-crust and swallowed them as so many sugar-plums; for "Good cooks allus taste," said Mrs. Rooney.

The children buzzed around the board like flies about a honey-pot.

"What you eatin', mudder?" from Taddy.

"Never you mind, sonny." She made a dive at him. "Taddy! Git out of the sugar bowl!"

At sight of the slices of green apple she was ladling into the pans, he threw his potato on the floor.

"Me want apple!"

His mother pushed the dish out of reach of the chubby hands. "Ma wants them apples fur pies, honey. The big old men is

goin' to eat all the apples up an' all the 'taters up—they ain't none fur ma's pet."

The boy set up a loud yell, but she went on talking still more loudly until he pulled a basin of water over his head. Then she jerked him by one arm into the living-room. "I never see sich a young-un in all my born days!" she said, irritably. "Ruth, you take him an' put him into something dry."

The men came straggling home to dinner, brown and dusty after a morning's forking potatoes in the field. They drank at the well and washed their hands, waiting shyly outside until the meal was announced, when they trooped into the kitchen and smoothed their hair before a small, distorting glass that hung in a corner.

"Come on, girls!" cried Mrs. Rooney. "Don't you be bashful; there's only one stranger here! This is Mr. Joe Puttincamp, from Cripple Crick. He's awful jolly—but he's married, though," she added in an audible tone, winking at her guests.

Mr. Joe Puttincamp, of Cripple Creek, bowed low. He was a stout young man,

with a forward manner and bulging greenish eyes like a bull-frog's; he wore his hair banged, with a plastered curl in the middle of a receding forehead.

"Here's my Pete; you know him, Ruth. This is Miss Wood, Pete, Ruth's cousin come to visit her; them two girls is bachin' it over to Ruth's claim. An' this is Grandpa Wilkins. An' this is Bob Jenkins; he's diggin' potatoes fur Pete. Now you know each other. Set up an' help yourselves, girls. Don't be backward!"

It was a table spread helter-skelter; hot soda-biscuits and mealy potatoes boiled in their jackets were jumbled together; the fried pork was browned to a turn; the coffee was yellowed with cream; country fashion, cake, pie, and pudding bombarded each plate.

The children drummed on the table, clamoring for the first helping. Their father placed one on each side of him, filled their plates and kept a kindly eye upon them; and with fingers and spoons they fell to. He was a silent man, Pete Rooney; he was a good ten years older than his wife,

and he had a rough, red head and tousled beard.

The hired man ate and drank speechlessly, appropriating to himself a large amount of elbow-space.

But old man Wilkins was more socially inclined. He was the great-grandfather of Jimmy and Taddy, a toothless old man having a yellow leathern face, fringed with stubby white hair and beard.

"And how's the sickly one?" suavely inquired old man Wilkins, his underlip shaking with age; he spoke in a leisurely drawl.

Ruth flushed. "Pretty well, thank you."

"Air ye campin' out, like, on the per-air-ah fur yer health?"

"Partly for that."

"These per-air-ahs air considered toler-'ble healthy fur invalid folks of yer build, that air weak and sickly-like, so I've heered. Yer cousin thur looks ruggeder, like as if she had been raised on the per-air-ah."

A pause, during which old man Wilkins stirred mashed potato into his tin of buttermilk, and poured in molasses until the contents were a rich straw-color.

"Better settle down on these hyur per-air-ahs an' git married. Now my advice to you ladies is to rustle around an' git ye a feller apiece agin' the other gals has hed thur pick. Ye'll never hev a better chance —thur's several likely young men out in these parts that air jest lookin' around fur to git them a woman agin' they take up land an' settle down on these hyur per-air-ahs."

Mrs. Rooney waited on the table in her hospitable fashion.

"Have some more of the pork, Hermia. You ain't half eatin'! We butchered one of our hogs last Tuesday week; the littlest one of the lot. It's some early to kill hogs afore cold weather sets in, but Pete, he says we'd ought to kill off one or two an' stop the feed bill, an' we knowed we could use it up afore it spoiled, an' it potato diggin' too an' all them men to eat. Ain't the flies jist awful? We ain't got no screens to our house, an' I can't get shed of the flies, no-how! It jist plagued me, awful, to have you girls to my house to a meal in fly-time, honest."

"Heard what price spuds bring over to Cripple Crick, Joe?" inquired Pete Rooney of Mr. Puttincamp.

"Sixty a hundred or thereabouts."

"Beats me how these hard times keeps up," said Pete. "Prices dropping, banks failing—the country is going to bust up one of these days."

"If them fool easterners," said Mr. Puttincamp, "would put the right man in, now. Put the man in fur president, says I, that understands the West; what's good for the West is good for the East. I've got my eye on one man," raising his voice, "that's fit to sit in the president's chair, and no mistake. A man that understands the principle of sixteen to one from bottom to top. A man that would open up the West in good shape, give him half a chance. A man that's got the grit to fight it out—first with argyments and last with blood, and come out ahead every time! And that man's WAITE! Waite would make the world hum! I had the luck to hear him speechify down there in Denver. If he didn't raise Cain with his blood to the

bridle-bits! That's the kind of talk we want, says I! It made my American heart boil, by jolly! WAITE'S the man to fill the bill, and don't you forget it!"

"Say, Waite made things pretty lively up there to Cripple Crick time of the Bull Hill strike, didn't he?" remarked Pete.

"You bet your life. Took old Waite to set the camp humming. There was one night there when the old man was settlin' up things that us boys got pretty high. We was all full, not to hurt, you know, but just enough to feel good—and we kep' a-scrappin' with the cops all night. My brother, he got into a scrap, and I takes his part. I grabs the cop and ketches hold of his legs till he was throwed. Then up steps another feller with a billy and I settles him. I gets into a scrap all around. Then I steps up and agrees to pay the fine. One of these here Salvation Army fellers stops at the corner saloon and sings,

'If you get there before I do,
Just tell the rest I'm coming too'

and we joshed him till he lit out. We set on the curb-stone and joshed and hollered

all night. My throat got so sore with joshin' that I couldn't hardly speak above a whisper by mornin'. Yes, mom, I ain't had such a bully time since us boys egged the cowboy preacher out of camp. I got hit on the head by an egg myself that night, but it was a fresh egg, all right."

"Waite's pretty smart of a gov'nor; there won't be no hard times, long, with him to even up things. He ain't no doughhead, Waite ain't," observed old man Wilkins.

"What in thunder started all these hard times, anyway? If it's going to get so thundering hard to live out here, it's time to quit this doggoned country," growled the hired man, in a grumbling bass.

"These hard times," old man Wilkins explained, "hed oughter be blamed on thet thur gorl-darned Harrison. He air the prime cause fur the scarcity of money at the present day; and we air in the pinch now on account of him, and no other."

"Oh," said Hermia, "Harrison made a pretty good sort of a president."

Rose Rooney upset a coffee-cup.

"Oh, but jist think what Harrison done. When Harrison was president, he stole the *treasury!*"

Her husband gave a contemptuous laugh. "Oh, come off! you don't know anything about it. My woman," turning apologetically to the visitor from Cripple Creek, "she thinks she knows it all, and she don't know the first thing about politics, and never will."

"I do, too! You needn't think I'm so awful dumb! I guess I've heard about Harrison's stealin' the treasury!"

Mr. Puttincamp's oily tones smoothed the troubled waters.

"I guess your wife's about right, Pete. There ain't much difference between 'stole' and 'robbed'—leastways you wouldn't be apt to think so if a coon meddled with your hen-roost, ha, ha, ha!" And Mr. Puttincamp laughed heartily, and winked in a familiar way at the two guests.

Mrs. Rooney fixed her eyes on Hermia's face and asked, suddenly:

"What ticket 'r' you goin' to vote this election?"

"Oh, the Republican, I suppose."

"Then you're twenty-one. You're old enough to vote!"

The men laughed. Hermia exchanged a humorous glance with her cousin, which said, "Caught, that time!"

The baby woke out of a nap. His mother brought him to the table just as he was, all warm and pink, and fed him greasy gravy on potato, bits of soda biscuit, pie and cake, and strong coffee.

"Jist see my baby eat," she said, with pride. "He c'n eat everything that I do, an' he only four months old next Sunday. He's got an awful strong stummick. Taddy, he never use' to could eat things like Marky can. He can't eat like Marky can, now, can he, tumpty-wumpty? Marky's strong, but he's homely. He's the homeliest young-un I've got. He's an awful homely kid, ain't he, sweet, silly sing?"—punctuating her words with kisses.

The men pushed back their chairs and went off to their work. Old man Wilkins ambled after them, first replacing in his toothless mouth his quid of tobacco.

Dinner over, the guests wiped the dishes while Rose washed and "swilled" them.

Then Rose Rooney must needs take them out to see the live-stock.

She tucked the baby into his buggy and flung a quilt over him, saying, "Marky'll be good till we git back—he's the best baby to stay alone by hisself, Marky is!"

She led the way, first to the pig-pen to exhibit the fattening porkers. She took her guests down into the potato cellar to show them the ton or so of potatoes already gathered in, and she stopped at the well and drew a bucket of clear, soft water with the windlass.

"This water ain't got a bit of alkali in it. None of the water out here hasn't. Down around Denver they say the alkali is so bad that when the men sweats, the alkali comes out on their shirts, from drinkin' the stuff."

"There's the old locoed horse," said Jimmy.

"Old locoed horse," echoed Taddy.

They pointed to a weazened, hide-bound bronco with drooping head and sunken

eye and legs that bent under its light weight; it was standing motionless in the shade of the house.

"Didn't you never see a locoed horse afore?" asked Rose Rooney, in a pitying tone. "Well, you see one now. That's the way they git when they eat the loco—you know that purple flower that grows out here; there's a bunch now, a-growin' by the corner of the stable. Jimmy, you run an' git her a sprig of it. It makes the cattle crazy to eat it, an' then they pine away an' die; they don't never git over it. That old horse must have eat a lot of it. He was plumb crazy, like he'd been bit by a mad dog. They tied him in the stable an' he broke loose an' kicked an' rolled an' bit. He smashed every stall in the stable—they wasn't a whole two-by-four left inside. Jist come here an' I'll show you the marks where he bit chunks out of the logs. He was that way till he wore hisself all out. That was more'n two months back. Then he got kind o' quiet an' stupid, an' he wouldn't eat none. He gits poorer an' poorer every day of his life. He won't last long, now."

Her guests had already looked too long at the poor little brute. They went into the house, wondering why Pete did not put an end to his misery. Their hostess soon put them to work.

"Ruth, you take that waist of Jimmy's an' sew up them seams on the machine. I've got to patch this shirt of Pete's, plague take it. Hermia, you mind the baby; you don't seem to have nothin' else to do."

The little ones romped and frisked like young calves after a full meal. Jimmy jumped into the bed and Taddy after him. They hammered the pillows with their dusty little shoes, they turned somersaults, they whooped and roared. A feverish flush leaped to Ruth's pale cheeks. But the baby slumbered peacefully on; and their mother rocked and talked and sewed. When Hermia sprang to the rescue of the wraps on the bed, she only said, composedly: "Oh, never mind the bed—the children wallers in it all day."

Rose Rooney was not so deeply absorbed in her work as to neglect the world outside. She rushed to the open door.

"Believe my soul, that's Claude Fairley! Wonder what he's took that road fur? Him an' his brother's ranch is five miles to the north of here."

Ruth left the machine. "Oh, is that Claude Fairley? You must have a look at him, Hermia—he's a college graduate, and he's roughing it out here on a cattle ranch." She looked up and down the road. "Why, where is he?"

Rose Rooney pointed. After looking up and down and all around, their eyes travelled out to the prairie, and they noticed afar off, perhaps three-quarters of a mile or more, a small object moving slowly southward.

"How do you know that's Claude Fairley?"

"Can't you see his cart?" contemptuously.

"But how can you tell a cart at such a distance?"

"Where was you raised? Can't you see them two wheels? That's his roan mare, too. I could tell that mare anywheres—she goes sideways. You Wood girls is so

odd, you ain't never learnt to use your eyes, none."

"Perhaps you can tell us what he has on," said Ruth.

"Or the expression on his face," added Hermia.

Rose missed the sarcasm. She again strained her gaze. "He's got on that red shirt of hisn," she announced. "An' there's something tied to the springs of the cart—'t looks like a jug. I bet I know where he's bound!" with animation. "He's goin' up by Post's, an' then he's goin' 'round by Arrowhead to git his jug filled!"

She went back to her work. Her eyes narrowed. "You girls better set your caps fur him. He won't be hard to ketch. They say he's awful anxious to git him a wife."

"H'm," said Ruth, hastily turning her back on the distant cart, "I wouldn't be seen speaking to that Claude Fairley!"

Rose Rooney veered about like a weather-cock at the first breath of wind.

"I never did like that Claude Fairley, nohow," said she, "nor his brother Dave, neither. I tell you what's the matter of

them: they're bigoty! So's the old lady. The bigotiest lot I ever see, the whole outfit of 'em."

Her face reddened and she sewed with a furious needle.

"Girls," said she, "I was that riled last Saturday week when I went to the Springs to do my tradin' that I could a' said bad words! Honest, I could! I've been takin' my eggs to the woman that lives in the big shingled house on Cascade Avenue, the green house with the white trimmings, you know. And I went to the front door like I allus do—ketch me goin' 'round to the back door like any rag-picker! An' I rung the door-bell. An' the woman, she opened the door reel quick an' she says, 'After this come to the back door with your eggs!' Them's the very words she said! 'After this come to the back door with your eggs!' Well, I jist looked a hole through her, an' left. *Chaw my heel*, if I ever ring her door-bell agin, or go 'round to her back door, neither! I jist won't be put upon, now I tell you! Say, girls, I'm awful glad you ain't tony, like that woman; why, I

wouldn't know how to talk to you if you was! There's another woman that lives in one of them big houses that I take my eggs to that's jist as different! She allus smiles as pleasant and as'ts me inside, and as'ts me if I'm tired, an' how Jimmy is—I took him with me, onc't. She ain't a bit stingy of her pleasant words. I tell you what it is, girls, she's common, like me 'n' you. There ain't nothin' bigoty about that woman. I like folks that's common and treats everybody pleasant alike. But some of them rich bugs is so mean.

"I took Jimmy to the Springs last time but one," went on Mrs. Rooney, "an' the little skeesics, he thought the fruit stalls an' candy stands were free to all to help theirselves. 'Twas the first time he's went to the city since he was a teenty kid like Marky, an' he didn't know no better. He got off with consider'ble truck without bein' ketched at it; but he was li'ble to git us into trouble. It tickled me some to see the kid."

"Do you like Mr. Crimp as much as ever?" Hermia inquired, wishing to beguile

Rose Rooney into speaking of her immersion.

"Like him! Guess I do! Don't you? I never see a man that could git up an' preach along like him—he could talk an arm off you! Pa says he's the smartest man of his time. Pa's all wrapped up in Mr. Crimp. He was converted in June, pa was. An' did you ever see anything solemner than the way that man conducts at baptizings? I declare to goodness, girls, when I went into the water, an' he said them solemn words, I couldn't help it, honest, I jist had to cry! I got to shakin' from head to foot. I wasn't afraid, but I jist got all stirred up like, inside of me. An' I felt like I was dyin', an' my children was took away from me, an' Pete was took away, an' —oh, I don't know what all! I felt like I was at my own funeral! I'm awful glad the Christians doesn't believe in baptizin' you more'n onc't. I tell you I'd back out if they come fur me agin! I jist would! I'd be a backslider! 'Twas a awful hard pull for me to put my mind on goin' into the water; but I don't care, now it's over.

Bein' dipped give me the right to go in at the gate of heaven, an' nobody can't take that away from me."

A dreamy look flitting into her face, she became again the Rose Rooney of the immersion. But the next moment she roused herself to give the sharp command:

"Jimmy! Git Taddy out of the machine-drawer! I never see that child's like to meddle—he's always got them fingers of hisn into something."

"What is Taddy's real name?"

"His real name? Taddy's short for Thaddeus."

"He has a Bible name, then."

"I give Jimmy an' Marky an' him Bible names a-purpose. Pa says there's something in it: if you give a boy a Bible name, they'll gener'ly turn up good. I'm goin' to name every boy I have after the apostles, if there's seventeen of 'em! My sister Em, she don't believe a Bible name is goin' to keep boys from bein' bad—she believes if they're goin' to be bad, they'll be bad, an' if they're goin' to be good, they'll be good, an' they ain't no help fur it! She says she's

goin' to call her boys decent names. So she's named her boy Roger. She's got her a great big rough boy, Em has, with years as big as mine."

"When is the next immersion coming off?"

"This comin' Sunday, it was give out to be. They's goin' to be five or six converts, if they don't none of 'em backslide, like Joel Milligan done. That Joel Milligan ain't got no sand; nor them Bitterns, neither. The women folks aim to try it agin: but Joel, he says no one ain't goin' to coax him into the water agin if he don't never git to heaven. An' I reckon everybody knows why, too." Rose Rooney lowered her voice, "Folks say he drownded a man, onc't. They say the sight of water allus makes him sick."

"Joel Milligan a murderer!" cried the listeners.

"Honest! That's jist what he done—drownded a man in cold blood. But that was a long while back, an' it's all blowed over. Him an' his pardner fell out over a calf that hadn't no brand on it, a maverick,

you know, an' they both claimed it. They chanced to meet down to a pond—folks say it was some like Bittern's, an' I reckon it was the sight of Bittern's sheep-pond put Joel in mind of what he'd done, when he went to git dipped. An' Joel, he's powerful stout in the arms, if he is small-built, an' his pardner had lung disease—he wound them arms of hisn 'round his pardner's neck, an' tripped him up, an' held him under water till he was stiff an' stark. An' that pond it wasn't more than *three foot deep*, they say. Joel, he kep' mighty clos't fur a few days, but the boys give him away, an' the sheriff run him down. He had his trial and was give eighteen months in the Pen. Joel, he served his time out, an' then he come back out here, an' took up a claim, an' kep' reel quiet an' stiddy, an' it all blowed over. Malviny Bittern, she come out to these parts with her folks in a schooner from Injun Territory, an' Joel, he kep' comp'ny with her. Folks said she done bad to yoke herself to a murderer, an' she didn't want him, noways; but her pa, he kicked up sich a rumpus, an' Joel, he stuck

to her so, that she took him to git shed of him. But they ain't no git-up to neither one of 'em: they don't seem to know how to git ahead, someways; Malviny or the children's allus sick, or something; they're awful shif'less.

"An' them ain't the only shif'less lot out here, not by a long ways," said Rose Rooney, in energetic tones. "J'ever see the Bunts? Well, them Bunts is the shif'-liest family that ever took up a claim an' couldn't work it. Shif'less? No name fur it! When we first come here to this house, I neighbored off an' on with Mis' Bunt; but land! I've had to give that up. I've took a despise to her. 'Tain't no use tryin' to neighbor with folks that ain't decent an' won't even pretend to be! I jist dropped the lot, honest, I did! Bunt, he drinks, when he c'n git it. Lon's been ketched at liftin' chickens as much as twic't; your pa'd do well to look after his hen-roost. I'll bet Lon knowed what went with that pullet your pa missed last week. An' Ted's an awful bad boy—he chaws an' swears! An' the girls is dreadful slack—the men that

gits them girls fur wives has got a elephant on their hands. They don't know how to housekeep nor nothin'. An' Mis' Bunt, she's the fussiest woman to live near by! She 'n me, we had a reg'lar up an' down scrap afore we quit neighborin'. I didn't sass her back nor nothin'; I jist kep' in an' let her gas till she about wore her tongue out on me. Her tongue is allus clackin'—she's got a awful sassy tongue, that woman has.

"Jimmy, you leave them lights be, d'ye hear? Them broken lights pester me dreadful. Yisterday, when I was stewin' over the stove with my back to the winder, a big Irishman stuck his head in, an' he says, 'Air ye trew potatez-diggin' yit, mum?' Land! he like to scairt the daylights out o' me, his big voice hollered through that broken light so suddent! Thought 'twas a tramp at first, but I might 'a' knowed better: we don't never have no tramps out here—too fur from the railroads. The feller he wanted work, but he didn't git it, all the same. Pete, he won't give no work to no plaguey Irishman, if he did hail from

the old country hisself—he knows 'em too well! He mistrusts 'em every time! Your pa, he was here this mornin' lookin' at the red heifer. An' he noticed them pillers that's stuck in them winder lights, an' he says, 'Put all your beddin' out to air, eh?' I was that plagued, I didn't know what to say, honest. I'll be tickled to death when I git them broken lights fixed! I don't care! When them's fixed, me an' Pete's got the comfortablest home this side of the Divide, if I do say it myself! There ain't another house on Windy Creek has got more room than ourn, nor their walls plastered, nor a brick chimney, neither."

Rose Rooney put half a dozen swift finishing stitches into her husband's shirt, and flung it across the room.

"There," said she. "That'll do fur temporary!"

The baby wakened and she ran to take it up. With the child lying across her knees she sang a snatch of a lullaby, and in her attitude—the curve of her graceful neck, her downward glance, the mother-light in her eyes, there was a trace of the pictured

Madonna. The older children, attracted by her song, drew to her knee, and Jimmy put out his hand to stroke the little one's head. In a flash a storm gathered and broke; Jimmy's face was slapped, and his little brother pushed rudely over on the floor. Again Rose Rooney made a picture; but this time it was the mother-cat cuffing her older offspring while she fondles her nursling.

The children cried themselves into a quarrelsome mood; the elder tyrannized over the younger, and the younger fretted and teased; but the mother paid no attention to their small woes. She was looking her guests over with a critical eye.

"Folks that has to wear glasses looks so old, don't they?" she remarked. "You can't see good without yourn, can you, Hermia? To think of your sight failin', an' you so young! Land! 'fore I'd be willin' to wear specs! S'pose I'll have to come to it some day, when I'm awful old. Jist look at Ruth's hands, how little they is, an' how fast she works! I don't see how you can sew none with sich little paws as them,

Ruth! You're that little all over that you can't amount to as much as natural sized folks like me 'n Hermia. Ruth, it's a good thing you never got married, it 'd be a shame fur you to palm yourself off on a man that was well. But your bein' undersized don't matter much, seein' as you're an invalid. They's less of you to be sick. Now, I've allus been robust an' I've allus had to hoe my own row—don't know what would a-become of me if I hadn't. In our fam'ly everybody had to look out fur number one. We was put out to work as soon as we was knee-high to a grasshopper. When I was young, I worked out. You'd better believe I worked hard, too! No soft pillers fur me! I was young then, only fourteen, girls, an' I put out big washin's, an' scrubbed floors till my hands was sore, an' cooked meals fur whole families! I never did stay long to one place—but 'twas 'cause I jist wouldn't be put upon! When the woman at one place got too sassy, I jist lit out, an' looked up another place. I tell you, I was pretty 'cute!"

She went to the window and looked restlessly up and down.

"Wish't a team or something 'd come along. Say, girls, know them Joneses that live down the hill there? They're awful ignorant people—they're Welsh. The Welsh is so ignorant. There's a lot in that little house—eleven children, and the father and mother and old man Jones—but he's half-cracked, he ain't all there. I sent Jimmy over to Mis' Jones's of a errand yisterday—no, mebby 'twas day before; but it don't matter. They's jist got up from the table, an' the young-uns' faces was all sticky, an' Mis' Jones, she wet the wash-cloth in some warm water an' went the rounds. Then what do you reckon that woman done? Slapped the wash-cloth into the dish-water and went to washin' the dishes with it! Yes, ma'am! Jimmy he see her! He come an' told me! Washed the dishes with the cloth she's wiped the young-uns' faces on! Oh, she's awful ignorant.

"Ain't heard any news anywhere, have you, girls?" inquired Rose Rooney, yawning. "I wish't something 'ud happen. I almost wish't there'd come a blizzard off somewheres, honest I do. Did you hear

about that blizzard they had out here last fall? My sister Lympy was ketched out in that blizzard. She was out gittin' up the cows, three miles from home. The storm blowed up awful quick an' she couldn't see nothin'. So she ketched hold of a cow's tail an' come home a-flyin'; the blizzard, it happened to be blowin' her way. They was two thousand sheep strown over the prairie after the storm blowed over. And they was the body of a woman found out on the Divide. They examined her and found she was thirty years old and well educated. Wish't something like that would happen out here. It's so awful dull on Windy Crick this year, there ain't no sparkin' to speak of, nor no pairin's off, nor nothin'. We need something to stir up our blood onc't in a while. There's Art Post soft as mush on that Scotch girl, Jean McLeod, but he don't seem to gain on her none. Guess she's got a mind of her own. But everybody says she'll end by marryin' him. Wish't she'd throw him over or elope with him. I can't bear to see folks jist paddle along like them two. Ruth, why don't you

set your cap fur Art an' take him away from her? That 'd be an excitement to even up things. I declare to goodness I'd do it 'f I was a girl. Then there's that Soph Crimp. Folks don't know whether he's keepin' comp'ny with Dianthy or Stelle or both, or whether he means business by either one of 'em. But I reckon Dianthy's a little softer on him than Stelle is, if you turn it the other way. Them are odd girls. They're gittin' a little old. Dianthy'll be an old maid afore she settles down if she don't look out. I guess she's nineteen. She told me her age two years back, but she won't tell it now. Oh, she's gittin' old, Dianthy is; she's had her day."

She thrust out her feet in front of her.

"Look at them shoes! Don't I need a new pair awful bad? Them's fours, honest, though they don't look it; sides busted out, soles flappin', heels run down—what size shoes do you wear, Hermia?"

"Tens, on the H last," replied Hermia, glibly.

"Oh, you're joshin'! You don't wear no tens. Ruth don't wear more'n ones, I

know, from the size of her foot. But she's so little anyway you can't see her. She ain't no bigger'n a bar of soap put out to dry. I wouldn't have sich little feet."

"Hermia, it's time we were going home," said Ruth, decisively; and Hermia sprang to her feet, saying, "Indeed, I think so, too."

"What's your hurry? Come over reel often, girls. When you don't know what to do with yourselves, come over an' mind my kids. I c'n keep you in work!"

The afternoon sun shone strong on Hermia standing in the doorway. "What a little, thin neck Hermia has got!" exclaimed Rose Rooney, who seemed to be in a perpetual state of astonishment over some new discovery. Hermia moved precipitately out of the door. She carefully held up the wires to let her cousin roll under the fence without doing further damage to her clothing.

Rose Rooney, watching from the piazza, screamed with laughter.

"Hermia, you act like you was Ruth's feller!"

Neither spoke a word until across the road and in the next field; then the cousins glanced at each other and simultaneously burst into merry laughter.

V

SOME NEIGHBORLY GOSSIP

"My woman, she'll be in d'rectly," said Mr. Bunt, removing the pipe from his lips to greet the Wood cousins at his door. He kicked away the three yellow shepherd dogs snapping at their heels, as he added, apologetically, "The women allus has to fix, ye know."

"Well, girls, thought you wasn't never comin'," cried Mrs. Bunt, at that moment entering the living-room from the kitchen. "Set down, an' make yourselves to home. Have cheers. Polly, you take thur things."

She was a comely woman, this Mrs. Bunt; and she wore her hair in a tight pug in the back corresponding to a turned-up nose in front. Her company gown was a wrapper of green and yellow calico, made with a Watteau pleat in the back.

"Polly, have you furgot that you-uns is

a young lady?" continued Mrs. Bunt. Her second daughter was trying on the hats and wraps that she had appropriated. "S'pose you quit that child foolishness of tryin' on other folkses belongin's an' light a few pine slivers in this hyur stove. An' leave the front door open so's to give the sun a chanc't to warm up. I laid off to make a fire in this room, but someways I didn't git around to it. It's cold-like in hyur—this room ain't easy het from the kitchen." And their hostess retired to hasten preparations for dinner.

"Say, you-uns is awful fixy," said Polly, admiringly. She perched a white sailor on her sandy, frizzled head, and looked sidewise at her image in the cracked looking-glass. "You look good in this sailor hat of yourn, Hermia. Your hair kind o' sticks out at the sides, so you don't look good 'thout you have a hat on."

The Bunt shanty was built in the shape of a capital T, the end of one long room joining the side of the other. Log-cabin quilts covered the beds; the windows were hidden by newspaper curtains pinned

across, and the walls were gay with picture-cards advertising soaps and sewing-machines and cottolene. The rooms were bare, but orderly and clean.

Through the open door the boys, tall, long-legged fellows, were seen coming in from work; they cast longing glances at the table.

"Maw," said the younger and slighter of the two, "ain't dinner 'most ready? I'm that hungry, I feel like I were all stove in."

"In half a minute, now. When them sody biscuits is browned, we'll set right down."

The boys shied away from the open door, but the sound of their voices was carried into the next room.

"Ketch any rabbits in yur trap last night, Ted?" This from Alonzo, who invariably wore a red bandanna neckerchief, loosely knotted, and whose features strongly resembled those of a goose.

"Ary a rabbit. But the trap ketched a owl—one of these yur little prairie-dog owls, you know. I packed that thur trap out yander an' set it on the side of the hill

whur they's likely to be rabbits, an' this mornin' yurly I paid a visit out thur, an' I found a owl had ben ketched instid of a rabbit. But it were all et up—all but one foot, 'n' hyur 'tis," fumbling in his pocket for the poor little foot.

"Well, I swan!" remarked Alonzo; "I'd like to know what the critter were that et up the owl; like's not 'twere a badger or a ki-ote."

"Say, Lon!" called Polly, "goin' to ride the colt after the cows to-night?"

"I aim to."

"Better have her cinch good 'n' fast. Us girls'll watch you off."

"I'd laugh if she throwed you," said Ted.

"Betchoo she won't! I've rode skittisher mares 'n her afore now. She bucks enough jest to call to buck—she bucks nice. I've rode that mare of Art's, an' the fellar that rides her has got to have some grit, now I tell ye. I've seen that mare jump so high that I could see the sky under her."

"Hooray fur the bronco-buster!" roared Ted.

The boys' hilarious mood died away when

the guests were called out to the table, heaped up with Windy Creek fare—soda biscuit, fried pork, and boiled potatoes, supplemented by the usual cake, pie, and pudding; smitten with sudden shyness, they bolted their dinner in silence, staring furtively whenever they thought themselves unobserved.

Hermia essayed to draw them into conversation.

"Do you ever shoot any coyotes out here?"

Alonzo looked at Ted and Ted looked at Alonzo, and both reddened to the tips of their ears. "Yes, mom, quite a few," Alonzo managed to get out at last; and he kicked his brother under the table, whereat Ted sputtered and choked.

When the dinner dishes were washed—Mrs. Bunt "dreened" hers in place of "swilling" them—the feminine portion of the party adjourned to the living-room, and the tidal-wave of gossip rolled gently in; for as receptive gossips Ruth and Hermia had already found their hostess to be one of those women who, if they would but

"press the button," would cheerfully "do the rest."

"Polly," said Mrs. Bunt, "s'posin' you git out the machine an' go on with yur red Henrietta whiles you've got the chanc't. Her pa got her a bran new dress to wear to dances this winter. Sence she's got to be a young lady, she can't be fixy enough."

The girl proudly displayed her new garment, cut out and partially put together. In Windy Creek circles basting is an unknown science; so Polly fitted the parts of the basque together without this preliminary step, and rapidly sewed up the seams on the whirring machine.

Mrs. Bunt drew attention to the wrapper she was wearing.

"How do my tea-gownd do fur noo, girls? I bought it to the Springs, reel cheap. Ninety-eight cents were all it cost me. Bein' thick-made, I'm no great on wrappers, but this don't look on me like a wrapper do."

"I suppose you miss Cicely," remarked Ruth, when the "tea-gownd" had been sufficiently admired.

"Her pa do, dretful. The house don't seem quite like, with Cis gone. I kind o' hated to see her leave, an' she so great fur home, but she said she weren't goin' to see her pa buyin' her clo'es, she'd arn 'em herself. She's a free-hearted girl, Cis is."

"The boys is layin' off to git her up a dance fur a s'prise, like, when she gits to come home agin," said Polly above the noise of her machine.

"Has yur maw raised many chickens this yur?" asked Mrs. Bunt. "Our aigs chicked good, and I aimed fur to raise a hundred by fall. But I failed, 'long o' Flory. Do you mind Lon's black shepherd? She were Queenie's aunt. She et forty chickens or thurabouts fur me this summer. She were awful smart, Queenie were, an' I thought 'twere rats or some varmint till I come acrost her unbeknownst, one day. I see that dog a-trottin' off with a chicken in her mouth and one eye on the house, an' I made up my mind she were too 'cute fur me. I give her away.

"Is the milk fallin' off much to your paw's? Some of our cows is commencin'

to strip. That Holstein of ourn's holdin' out good; she gives lots of cream in her milk; she appears like a rich cow. 'Tain't often you come acros't a Holstein that's a poor milker. Paw, he laid off to pack some of the Holstein's milk to his sister—she lives to the Springs, an' she's got a sick baby. He had me to fill two bottles, cream 'n' all, an' he hauled them to town 'long of a load o' spuds. But when he went fur to lift them two bottles out, they'd broke with the joltin' an' the milk were all spilt. Milk's onhandy to pack."

In the short pause that followed, Polly observed, "You-uns must like church; I see you to the school-house reg'lar on Sundays." Then, "Don't you-uns think Mr. Crimp is jest lovely?"

Here was a poser!

"He seems to be rather a popular preacher," said Ruth, evasively.

Mrs. Bunt's eyes snapped; she spoke up with decision:

"I an' paw don't tie to Crimp. The young folks they do think he's some, but I an' paw can't someways swaller him!

We-uns sized that man up first we see of him. He's small potatoes, Crimp is."

"Now, maw," began Polly.

"I don't keers if I do speak out my mind fur onc't, Polly; that man do preach sermons that's all-powerful teedjous! An' he's got a most tremenjous good opinion of hisself, Crimp has. No man ain't called on to have no sech opinion of hisself. I didn't go fur to speak my mind, that-a-way," apologized Mrs. Bunt. "I'm li-ble to have my head took off fur it; but it do rile me, so it do."

"The Fliegers an' the Posts is stuck on him," said Polly, with tears in her voice.

"Yes, an' the Bitternses and the Milliganses an' all them other ninnies. Never mind talkin' now; mebbe you'll see Crimp with paw 'n' my eyes one o' these days.

"Look at the way that man do hold up that thur fam'ly of hisn over folks's heads, like nobody never done nothin' till the Crimps was borned! 'T makes me sick. Know why his paw weren't brainy, like his maw? 'Cause his paw's took up a claim

out hyur, an' folks can see fur thurselves the old man ain't got no brains to spare. Know why his maw were smart an' rich an' han'some an' a Greek? It's this-a-way: his maw bein' dead an' in her grave long afore Crimp come to these hyur parts give him the chanc't to claim that that puddin'-head of hisn come straight from her side of the house. Oh, Crimp give hisself plumb away to I an' paw, he did!

"Look at that man's baptizin's!—how folks doos resk their healths! Thur's Malviny Milligan; now, she were dipped last Sunday an' she not able to quit her bed fur the next three days. That woman's so frail-like, she ought to knowed she couldn't stand water that-a-way. An' what would them little young-uns of hern do if thur maw were to be took off, suddent? Thur ain't no religion in ketchin' yur death o' cold an' leavin' yur young-uns fur a step-mother to knock around! Thur ain't ary one of the Bitternses has got a constitootion. I mind Malviny when her first child were borned. It were the fisilest little thing, it only lived a month and a half. When it up an' died,

she took on awful; she like to broke her heart over it.

"Thur's Bruce Post's wife, Em; she's got her a fine baby now that ain't got nothin' the matter of it to begin life with. It favors its paw; its got blue eyes and right blood-red hair. 'T seems like no matter how many times them Posts marry, they can't git shed o' thur red heads. It breaks out in every noo crop o' children, so it do. The Posts, they hail from Texas. They's dretful easy riled. An' they don't wear suspenders. I never see a Texan yit that wore a suspender."

"And where did the Bitterns come from?"

"The Bitternses they come from 'way down south in Virginny. To hyur them two girls talk you'd think they was niggers lest you chanc't to look thur way. Now, we-uns was raised down in Tennessee. My folks live down thur yit, an' so do paw's. 'T seems like the people out hyur's from so many diff'rent States that all of them talks diff'rent. Now thur's the Fairleys, Claude an' Dave an' the old lady—they

come from New York. The people that live in New York State, they is what you call Yankee people. They don't talk like the people do out West. Whur we-uns say 'What-fur,' they say 'What-fore,' that-a-way. It sounds furrin like, to hyur them kind of people speak; they is awful plain to talk, though. The Fliegers is south, too, but they talk diff'rent from what we-uns do agin. The old lady, she an' her two oldest, Rose an' Em, they was borned an' raised in the State of Kaintucky. The old lady, she picked up Flieger after she came out West; so he don't count. She come out in a schooner, an' Rose an' Em—they was little things then—they begged on the way out fur the grub they et. Rose Rooney she gives herself airs like she were some; but we all know how she come out to Coloraydo—ragged an' barefoot an' beggin' her way.

"Yisterday Rose Rooney, she sent over after the camp-fire. That woman has got the most gall ever I see—to send over to borry an' not to be on speakin' terms, neither. I an' her hasn't spoke these six weeks."

"Maw let her have the camp-fire bottle, though," said Polly.

"Yes, I give it to her. It ain't in me to hold back medicines from a sick woman. Pete, he were by this mornin' an' he left the bottle. She'd emptied it, all right. Pete Rooney, he makes a good man fur Rose, he do. He's a awful good provider, an' she so wasteful, too. She's dretful slack in some of her ways, Rose is, fur all she slashes 'round like all possessed when she gits a fit o' clairin' up. Cis were over to her house onc't an' she see Rose washin' the dishes in the butter-bowl; and then she took and scrubbed the floor, a-usin' the butter-bowl fur a mop-bucket. And onc't she washed Taddy's feet in the bread-pan. 'Tain't safe to eat victuals of Rose's cookin'. Thur ain't another man that I knows of that 'ud put up with her didos the way Pete do. Them little young-uns of hisn is the very apples of his eye, an' he won't never leave Rose, 'long of them. I feel sorry fur the little things to think they has to be raised up in the world not to know nothin' only jest fussin' an' quarrelin'—poor little

toads. Pete, he's as stiddy an' hard-workin' as she is slack. He's a Catholic, Pete is; quiet an' clos't-mouthed, not one to run after every new preacher that comes along. But he won't never hender Rose from runnin', nor from takin' the children, neither. Rose, she's all took up with religion an' sech, an' she makes a dretful to-do over these yur baptizin's. But she can't hold a candle to Pete—he's fur an' away the best of the two, if he ain't religious like her. Pete, he got hisself into hot water when he fell in love with Rose—he ain't never had no peace sence the day he laid eyes on that woman. He were workin' fur a cattle-king out hyur that he owed some money to, an' it took him seven yur to pay it. The cattle-king were uncle to Mis' Flieger's two oldest girls, Rose an' Em. An' one day along come Rose to work fur her uncle, an' them two was throwed together, an' Pete, he up an' fell dead in love with her. She were wearin' knee-dresses then, a gawky, tall thing, but bright's a razor. Mis' Flieger, she were figgerin' how to git her girls married off good an' yurly, an'

she were dretful smooth to Pete. An' when the seven years were worked out, Rose an' Pete, they set up on his claim, immediate. Rose, she weren't fifteen yet when she were married; an' they do say she never cared fur Pete nor fur ary one of the boys, but were jest give away like a doll made out of saw-dust. When I hearn about how them two come together, I were minded of Rachel an' Jacob, an' how Jacob served seven yur fur Rachel. But them two didn't pan out like the two done in the Bible. Thur ain't ben much love lost atwixt them two over yonder. I use' to think Rose Rooney were right smart of a woman; but we-all have got that wore out by her two-facedness; we ain't got no more use for her nor hern. It's a heap better to drop a woman like Rose 'n to be etarnally fussin' with her. I've ben a mother to that woman, but it didn't pay. I've took keers of her when she was sick a-bed—she had a awful bad spell with her head last fall. Pete, he were off to town yurly that mornin' with a load of spuds, an' he'd left Rose washin' the dishes, same's ever. He hadn't gone

above half a mile when my Lon, he came a-tearin' after him, cryin' that Rose were dead. Lon, he'd chanc't to pass Rooney's, an' he'd seen Rose crossin' the yard with the empty swill-bucket in her hand—she'd ben swillin' the pigs—an' he see her fall, an' pick herself up an' fall agin, acros't the door-step. He run to her, an' when he see her in a dead faint he 'lowed she were dead, an' he put down the road fur Pete 's tight 's he could go. Pete, he growed right white like a cloth, an' he turned them horses of hisn an' went back on the lope, load 'n' all. He gethered Rose up where she'd fell an' lay her on the bed like she were a baby. When I come home, he were a-hanging' over her, a-cryin' like she'd ben the best woman to him! She didn't come to fur an hour or more, an' when she did she were out of her head. She were a awful sick woman. I took keers of that woman an' set up with her nights an' minded her young-uns—I were a mother to that woman. But law! all I got fur it were, 'What fur do you do that-a-way?' 'Why don't you do this-a-way?' So I up an' left. Of

all the ungratefulest, cantankerous women, Rose Rooney she do be the worst I ever struck.

"Ain't Jimmy the sensiblest child not to be four yur old yit? An' so old-like, with his talk about the crops, an' cattle, an' land —he knows a heap about ranchin' a'ready. An' he minds the children like a little old man; he's as stiddy as Pete. He thinks a heap of his daddy. He's only bad when his maw's around. Polly see him out to the potato-patch day before yisterday— Polly, you tell about Jimmy out to the potato-patch."

Polly laughed.

"Jimmy were out to his paw's potato-patch, a-workin' to git Taddy started fur home, an' the young-un didn't want to go. After Jimmy'd coaxed him an' jawed him an' turned him face about an' worked with him nigh onto half an hour, the young-un set down flat on the ground an' Jimmy couldn't budge him. An' Jimmy he looked black, an' he folded his arms acros't his chist, so, an' he says, says he, '*Gorl darn* sech a child!' I were that tickled at the young-un I liked to died laughin'."

"Em, she's diff'rent," continued Mrs. Bunt. "She ain't tonguey like Rose; she's soft in her ways, an' she minds her husband an' child an' lets other folkses alone. Her pa use' to say to her 'fore she left home to be married, 'Em's the lady of the fam'ly!' An' I reckon he were about right.

"Rose, she come rightly by her temper from her maw. That thur woman is as cantankerous as a old cat, an' the only raison in creation I an' her ain't had a split afore now is 'cause we live so fur apart. Her nature's like a cross-cut saw—allus a-rubbin' aidgewise agin things, an' a-scrapin' an' a-raspin', never iled, an' a-settin' a body's teeth on aidge with its screechin'. Folks that neighbor with her'll all tell you the same story. I've got the idee that she puts Rose up to the most of her didos. Rose's allus twic't as cranky after she's ben up to see her maw, or her maw has ben up spendin' the day. They do say a man with any backbone to him couldn't live with Mis' Flieger three days 'thout throttlin' her—she's that ornery. But Flieger, he could live with the divil himself an' not git riled.

He's like a big lamb 'round the house, an' he shed's her jawin's like a duck doos rain-water. But I do despise thees yur lamby-like kind of men that leaves other folks to do thur stewin's fur 'em! Flieger sheddin' of his wife's jawin' only gives them more of a chanc't at Betty. Mis' Flieger, she lays out to be one of thees yur invaleeds that's got more'n enough diseases the matter of 'em to fill a Ayres almanac. So she doosn't pretend to do no work; she jest sets around an' jaws the whole blessed time. The heft of the work falls onto Betty, bein' as she's big an' strong. An' that pore child, not havin' the chanc't to skin out of the house like her paw, 's got to hyur the scrapin' an' the screechin' an' the raspin' of the cross-cut saw from mornin' till night. She's a awful free-hearted girl, but it do wear on her, so it do. Her maw's allus a-tellin' that she don't do enough, an' Betty a-killin' herself with the work. I were over to Mis' Flieger's one day an' I see right then how Betty were put upon by her maw. Betty were right young then, not more'n eleven year old; she were stouter'n what she be

now, an' all bent over like, with the work. She put out a tremenjous big washin' an' emptied the tubs, an' I see her jest drop fur a minute onto a cheer out in the kitchen to rest herself. Then her maw began to jaw at her an' tolt her to git right up an' go to churnin', an' cod her about bein' so clumsy like. An' I see Betty git out the churn, an' pour the cream in, an' go to joggin' the dasher up 'n' down, up 'n' down, with her fat sides an' her big arms joggin' too, an' her back bent over, an' that yellowy-white streak 'round her mouth that give her the look of bein' ready to cave in; an' I jest couldn't hardly holt in, I were that riled. An' all the while her maw'd fling out at her an' say, 'Betty's so big,' 'Betty's so fat thur ain't no shape to her,' 'Betty's took after her paw—he ain't nothin' but a lump of flesh,' an' sech like. An' thur were that Olympy, that I could 'a' took an' shook, a-runnin' off out doors to play, an' doin' nary a lick to help her sister, nor her maw makin' her do it, neither. She's her maw's apple of the eye, Olympy is; but you'd better believe when

Betty leaves home to git married her maw won't git the work out of Lympy that she gits out of Betty. Lympy ain't no hand to work in the house nor in the field, neither. She's a awful independent child."

"Onc't," put in Polly, "Betty, she were chased by a Texas steer, an' she went to roll under a barb-wire fence, an' she got caught an' tore awful. She wouldn't say a word about it to home, but kep' it to herself fur fear her maw'd badger her afore folks fur bein' so big an' clumsy that she couldn't roll quick under a fence. She kep' in about it till her maw come on her unbeknownst the next day, rollin' over on the floor an' cryin' from the pain—she's that feared of her maw's tongue."

"They do say," went on Mrs. Bunt, "her 'n' Curly O'Coole will make a match. He's little an' red-headed, an' she's about as opposite as could be. He's old, nigh onto thirty, I should reckon, an' twic't her age—she's fourteen. He's quite a beau, an' a man of the world asides—he's got him a ranch in South Americy, an' he's ben all over. Folks says Flieger he's held out all

sorts of indoocements to that man to take his daughter off his hands, an' Curly, he do appear to be dancin' attendance ruther lively.

"Have you-uns seen Miss Staver, the school-teacher that were hired to teach our school last yur? You'd jest ought to see her, she's a awful independent woman! Mis' Flieger, she boarded her when she first come out hyur; an' she were that riled when Miss Staver quit her at the end of three weeks an' got boardin' with the Jenkinses, whur she didn't have no wash-bowl nor pitcher, an' had to sleep with the children, three-a-bed. Mis' Flieger had went to a lot of trouble fur her—she'd fixed up the room fine, an' give the teacher a wash-bowl an' pitcher an' half a bed to herself. But she turned up her nose an' left. Said Flieger's was too religious fur her; Flieger, he has fam'ly prayers an' as'ts a blessin' at the table. Mis' Flieger, she said she'd had enough of it—she were leary of school-teachers—they might lie on the ground after this, fur all her. Folks likes Crimp fur a teacher a sight better'n they done Miss

Staver—they do say he gives satisfaction, all right. They say she never learnt the little ones a single thing, an' at the end of the yur ary a letter of thur alphabet did the little things know! Why, when I were a young-un, the first thing they done to me were to make me learn off my alphabet backwards! She were that smart, she were layin' off to learn them young-uns to read 'thout learnin' them thur letters—'word' readin' she called it, or some sech fool name. Now Crimp, he's teached three weeks an' a half, an' he's a-skimmin' the little things along so fast he's got 'em all in the second reader a'ready—the old folks is awful tickled over it. Miss Staver she wanted the school again this yur an' she fit hard fur it. But Crimp, he were eetchin' fur the job, too, an' he didn't have to rustle none, seein' he were in with all three of the directors at the election; the school were hisn almost afore he as't fur it. They give good wages to our school; forty dollars a month or thereabouts. Miss Staver, she didn't stand no show at all. She queered herself in this country last spring when she

licked Will Spruce. Didn't ye ever hyur about that? Well, I swan! It were the talk of Windy Crick.

"It were this-a-way. Will Spruce, he were sweet on Miss Staver, but he were dretful backward an' tongue-tied at sparkin'. He were the tallest boy in school, but stoop-shouldered like, an' spindly in the legs—kind o' delicate. He were dretful smart at his books—him an' Raleigh Post was the best scholars in school. He'd took up with some of these fancy studies 'long o' Miss Staver, an' I've hearn he were away up in botomy, like. But Miss Staver, she's a man-hater, if there ever was one; she took it out on the boys at school; they say she were never without one or two of the little fellars a-cryin' 'round her desk. You'd know her if you see her. She wears eye-glasses with a little gold chain danglin' over one yur, codfish style, an' her hair slicked straight back 'thout ary a friz—jest cut out fur a old maid. Well! she see Will Spruce kind o' hangin' around her, an' the other boys pokin' fun at him, an' the folks where she boarded at plaguin' her, an' she laid off to git even with him fur it. Fur

jest nothin' at all, she jumped on him one day. She'd made a rule that thur shouldn't be no swearin' on the playground; an' one recess Will he dropped a swear-word afore he thought, an' she hearn him out o' the winder. She called school, an' then she called Will up to her desk, an' took out her ferule. The scholars said Will turned white's a cloth, but he never said a word, jest looked at her. She were a little thing, he could 'a' whipped her, easy. She looked him over, an' then she called Sam Peters up; Sam, he's heavy-built. She tolt Sam to holt Will down fur her; an', would you believe it, he done what she tolt him to. She give Will a most tremenjous wallerpin', afore the whole school, an' ary one of them big boys an' girls stirrin' out of thur seats to stop her—all scairt an' brow-beat by that little thing, not twenty-one! Sam Peters, he felt dretful bad about it, he hadn't nothin' agin Will, nothin' at all; but when he were as't why he held Will he said he jest thought he had to, he jest couldn't help but mind that school-teacher! Will Spruce, he didn't show hisself at home nor no place

else fur a week, an' he quit school fur good. His paw 'n' maw 'n' sisters, they was awful mad at Miss Staver. The whole neighborhood were down on her. Law, she didn't keers none, went around holdin' her head's high as ever. But she lost her school fur next yur by it. Folks out hyur won't never hire her agin."

Mrs. Bunt's pleasant tones flowed on:

"They's likely to be two or three weddin's on hand afore long; the young folks on Windy Crick appear to be takin' a out 'n' out shine to each other of late. But they's one weddin' I don't want to see nor hyur of, an' that's Jean's an' Art's weddin'. Jean McLeod's right smart of a woman, now. Jest look how that girl has helped her paw! Thur ain't many girls would do like her—help in the house, an' work in the field, an' go to school, an' sew out, an' take keers of little Aureely so well. She's a dretful stiddy-hearted girl, Jean is. The fellar that gits her will git a good wife. Some says she liked Will Spruce reel well—she liked to cried her eyes out when he got that lickin' to the school-house—but they say

Will don't take no shine to the girls sence Miss Staver more'n jilted him. Jean an' Miss Staver was awful thick, onc't, but I reckon the trouble with Will Spruce has parted 'em fur good. An' now folks dò say how Jean goes with Art Post to spite Will. Beats all how the young folks doos mix thurselves up in theesyur love-affairs of theirn. Why can't they have some sense? Mis' McLeod, she's broke in her looks an' aged-like sence Jean began to keep comp'ny with Art. She see one of her daughters wigged off by one of them Post boys, an' that one has ben too many fur her. Madge McLeod, she were as much of a lady as Jean afore she set eyes on Mort Post, but she were high-steppin' an' head-strung, like a colt afore it's ben broke in. She's had enough to break her in sence her marriage, but she's not ben broke in right. She's like one of theesyur hard-mouthed, vixiny broncos that's took the bit in thur mouth an' won't stop fur no one. Thur ain't hardly a dance but what she's at, a-packin' all her young-uns to, an' a-robbin' the little things of thur sleep. She lives hard an'

she works hard, an' she dances hard. She's got a awful bold, brassy look out of her eyes, that woman has. Mis' McLeod, she tried to make the best of it, an' she an' Jean done a heap fur Madge's children. But they was a racket atwixt old man Post an' old man McLeod, an' Post's boys, they all took it up, an' Madge, she sided with her man's folks; an' now she won't speak to her paw 'n' maw, nor have nothin' to do with 'em. I see that woman one Sunday to the school-house come suddent on Mis' McLeod an' little Aureely settin' by themselves on a bench; an' if she didn't fling her head high, an' jerk past her maw! Mis' McLeod, she set still like a stone, lookin' straight ahead of her, with a kind of crazy look out of her eyes like she were a-weary of this life. I don't blame the woman. She'd ruther see Jean in her grave than jined to another Post. An' now hyur's little Aureely comin' on; Mis' McLeod'll soon have another growed-up daughter on her hands."

Her guests wished to know if Mrs. Bunt meant either of the Bittern girls when she

spoke of weddings near at hand, remarking that the sisters seemed to be favorites with the young men.

"They's sech favor-ites they ain't ary beau left fur none of the other girls; them two takes more'n thur share. But girls will be girls! If they ain't a mite stingy about anything else, when it comes to beaus, thur's ary a girl but what'll take all she can git, an' other folks can do without."

"What a pretty creature Diantha is!" remarked Ruth.

Mrs. Bunt pursed up her mouth.

"Dianthy ain't got much to boast on in the way of looks; she's right skinny; you kin almost see that girl's bones a-stickin' out. An' Stelle's black as a Injun. Betty Flieger, now, she's a right smart prettier'n them two; she's got a pulpy face, an' a clean skin on it, an' she's well fed an' hearty lookin', though she do be some stouter'n what she'd ought to be. But them Bittern girls, they don't need looks to hold thur own. They is peart-like girls, an' powerful easy mannered with the boys. I reckon that's why the boys take to 'em so. Ary dance

doos them two miss, nor ary religious meetin', neither. I tell my girls, when they gits to jawin' over the boys all goin' fur Dianthy an' Stelle, ' It's the girls that's the most life-like that ketches the boys,' says I. 'N' that's what. Dianthy, she's got three or four on her string, constant; thur's Raleigh Post, he's mashed on her, an' Phil Schuyler a-hangin' 'round, an' Hal Hopper a-castin' sheep's-eyes after her. Two yur back Claude Fairley, he tried to git to go with her, but she give him the bounce in a hurry. The boys they badgered him good, an' he got his mad up, an' flung out at her when she weren't around, an' smutched her some. It ain't jest safe fur a girl to give Claude Fairley the send-off. But I reckon Dianthy don't keers none. Sence Soph Crimp's come sparkin' 'round, Dianthy nor Stelle neither can't see nobody but him. Windy Crick ain't big enough to hold ary boy but Soph or ary man but Crimp. It's Soph's city ways has took them girls. He do seem a likely feller enough, Soph doos, but he can't help but take some after that swelled head onto his paw. Them young

folks gits to go to school from corn-huskin' till potato-plantin', 'long o' the open winters; an' there's a right smart of courtin' gits aidged in alongside of the book-learnin', an' don't you furgit it. They's a toler'ble big school to our distric', twenty-eight or thurabouts, they make it."

"They was a racket up to the schoolhouse last week—did you-uns hyur about it?" asked Polly. "They was two fights, all girls, an' Stelle Bittern in it both times. Stelle fit with Betty Flieger an' had a scrap with Huldah Moss, both inside of the week. The teacher were jest a-callin' school—he were goin' to the door ringin' the bell—an' Stelle an' Betty was stoopin' under the wire fence both a-jawin' fur all they was wuth, an' jest as Mr. Crimp got to the door, Stelle she up an' hit Betty a lick right in the eye. Betty grabbed holt of her, an' they had it up 'n' down—oh, it were awful! Mr. Crimp, he tried to stop them, an' Soph, he rushed in an' were goin' to make them quit. But Mrs. Despard, you know the grass-widder that lives by herself on a claim, she come by, an' she wouldn't let

nobody stop them; wanted to see fair play, she said. Then jest a few days after that, Stelle had another row with Huldah Moss —she's twic't as big as Stelle, and twic't as old. They was scrappin' all the mornin', but nobody thought 'twas goin' to turn out like that. It was jest after noon-time, an' we was scramblin' to our seats. Stelle slapped Huldah in the face, an' they fit an' fell over the desks. Oh, it were jest awful! I don't know what got into the girls—someway they didn't act like thurselves."

"Them Bittern girls, they ain't never had no raisin', pore things," said Mrs. Bunt. "That's a queer paw o' theirn. Thur paw he never 'lows them girls to go nowhurs 'thout he goes along—some says to purtec' them. I never see sech a man to be on the go—'less it were a young man; he's at every dance they is. Some says he do set great store by them girls of hisn, to pilot them 'round so. Law, we-uns knows a different tune to that. Some says them Bittern girls has it hard an' heavy to home; some says thur paw lays hands on them

two an' uses them downright cruel, an' they not doin' a thing to rile him."

The visitors suspended their needle-work to gaze in inquiring silence at Mrs. Bunt, who continued, placidly:

"It's goin' about that Dan Bittern's a evil man to them two girls of hisn. That man, he's got the face of a prowler; he shows it in the face. Folks do say he's the orneriest man that ever drawed the breath of life, an' he the father of growed-up girls that's been left to him this dozen year an' more by thur maw a-dyin'. Dianthy an' Stelle, they was little things when thur maw was took off, an' thur paw broke up an' packed the fam'ly off to Injun Territory. Them girls jest growed up with the wild Injuns. Then they come out hyur to Coloraydo in a perairie schooner. He's knowed to drink, that man is. We-uns have hearn how he draws a pension every quarter—he fit with the North, an' that's how he comes to draw a pension—an' folks says he drinks it up, every drop of it, an' them girls of hisn a-starvin' an' a-freezin'. You won't never hyur it from them girls, law,

them two is as close-mouthed! But Dianthy, she's come to show it in her looks. I never see a girl so deathly 'feared of anybody in all my borned days! It's growed on her, too. She's come to have a scairt look in her eyes whenever her paw's by. Some says her bein' so scairt of him makes it all the wuss fur her to home. When he comes nigh her, she'll draw back suddent, like she were goin' to be hit. I reckon that riles him, an' when he's alone in the house with her he lams her good fur it. I reckon he gives her six licks to Stelle's one, jest fur why she's 'feared of him an' Stelle ain't. Stelle, now, she kin take her own part an' sass back; an' if she do git a lick now 'n' then, she don't take on over it like it were a killin' matter; she don't keers, like Dianthy do. Dianthy, she's all broke up, like, when she's struck. An' her paw's that mean she gits the heft of the licks, folks says. I've hearn things, an' them we neighbor with has tolt things, an' the children, they've see things. Polly, she an' Betty Flieger, they walked over to Bitternses one Sunday evenin' to git the girls to go to

meetin' 'long of them. When they was goin' down the slope of the hill to the house they hearn screams an' sobs so piti'ble like they was 'feared to go on. But they pushed ahead, an' when they come to knock the sounds hushed up an' it growed so still they could 'a' hearn a whisper inside. Dan Bittern, he opened the door, an' peek as they might, they couldn't see ary one of the girls, an' when they as't fur them he says, gruff, like a dog, he s'posed they'd gone to meetin'. So they went on to the meetin', but the Bittern girls wasn't thur, of course not. Next day at school, Polly, she as't Dianthy about it. An', would you-uns believe me? That girl, she looked Polly straight in the eye, an' tolt off a lie jest as slick as anything. She claimed her 'n' Stelle'd ben havin' a game of romps together, an' they got high, a-screechin' an' a-hollerin', an' when the knock come they hid, thinkin' it were some of the boys come a-callin', an' bein' plagued to show thurselves, after bein' ketched hollerin' that-a-way. An' Stelle, she tolt off the same story, like she'd learnt it by heart. 'Queer

game of romps, thet,' says I, when Polly come an' tolt me.

" You can't someways blame the girls for bein' flirty, an' clairin' out from house 'n' home every whip stitch when thur's a chanc't fur a good time. I'd do more, I'd stay claired out if I was them. 'F I were Dianthy I'd git me a man right soon, an' set up in my own house whur I'd git shed o' my paw, an' be let be. She'd do better to take up with Raleigh Post than with ary boy of Crimp's. Raleigh'd make a good man fur Dianthy. Them two youngest boys of Post's is reel smart, stiddy boys, if they do be Posts. Raleigh ain't like Art. He lays off to teach our school one of these days, so he do. He's right bright at figgers, an' he's the best speller in school. But Dianthy don't keers no more fur Raleigh bein' 'round than she does fur a fly buzzin' at her yur. Thur's another that 'ud marry her to-morrow, if she'd have him, an' that's Phil Schuyler. Her'n Phil 'ud make a toler'ble good match. He's one of these fellers that's allus got his mouth stretched fur a laugh—he's a awful tease. But he's

dretful slow with his sparkin'; he ain't in no hurry; he's waitin' fur Soph to git out o' his way—an' every other feller; he ain't never goin' to say the word till he's sure of his girl. He's foreman of a big cattle-ranch north-like of hyur, an' he owns quite a few head of cattle in his own right. Thur's some that says he's clos't-fisted with his money, an' thur's others that says he drinks some—he goes off on a spree onc't in a while an' never comes back till he's all bunged up; but that don't happen very often. He's reel stiddy, mostly. I'd take Phil rather'n stay 'long o' my paw, if I were Dianthy. I'd take Hal Hopper, yes I would!" warmly protested Mrs. Bunt at a laugh from Polly. "I can't someways make out why Hal don't take with you young folks. Thur ain't nothin' the matter of him 'cep'in' he's scairt of hisself, an' easy deviled; an' he's a little queer. It appears like the boys is all down on him, an' the girls won't ary one of 'em go with him. But if Dianthy don't quit foolin' with Soph she'll git left. Her chanc't to git married ain't a-goin' to last long. She's growin'

old, an' she's begun to show her age in her face. She ain't as young as she use' to be. The fellars'll begin to shy off after awhiles."

A light skirmishing of the wind about the door warned the guests to break away from gossip's fascination. An army of tumbleweeds escorted them homeward; a most laughable spectacle it was—countless hulking brown bunches rolling and bouncing and airily skipping across the prairie, all headed north, and marching, almost as if imbued with life, before the wind.

VI

FREE METHODISM VERSUS CAMPBELLITISM.

Already, at the close of its first year, the star of Mr. Crimp's popularity was on the wane. Another form of religion had arisen in Windy Creek; and before the light of the new faith the old was fading away.

One sunny Sabbath morning of the Wood cousins' second September in the rain-belt, two congregations filled the school-house, each expectant of a sermon from its own particular shepherd. The forces had met; the opposing factions, worshipping here on alternate Sundays, to-day had clashed, owing to some blunder in the notices given out. Their leaders were late in coming; and, moved by a spirit of contention long harbored, the waiting flocks fell to disputing.

While their elders wrangled, the young people, sitting together now on benches

near the door, flirted openly. In these, his loyal followers, the subtle influence of Mr. Crimp was traceable; for more especially were the impressionable natures of the young stamped with the personality of him who had been their pedagogue as well as preacher for a twelve-month; there was a freedom from former stiffness; a certain assurance of manner; a disposition to trifle with serious subjects; a smartness in dress. A pleased agitation possessed their giddy souls. Far from feeling concerned as to their spiritual welfare, their minds were swayed by temporal things, not the least of these being personal adornment. The sunbonnet was in its decline. The girls had their hair frizzed; they wore cotton mitts, and large hats, trimmed high with gaudy flowers. The young men flaunted neckties and paper collars. A bright plaid gingham, with balloon sleeves, bedecked the plump person of Betty Flieger. Diantha and Estelle Bittern were like blue and pink morning glories in their sateens, whose cheap splendor a summer's wear had somewhat faded.

A rumor starting at the open door ran around the room. The two preachers, coming from opposite directions, were said to be nearing the school-house. The disputants drew apart. Silence fell. A hushed expectancy sharpened every face.

Mr. Crimp, walking very fast and swinging a stout cane, his face scarlet, his eyes scintillating, gained the steps and then the door two minutes in advance of his rival. With his pompous strut he swung quickly down the aisle; he laid his hat and stick on the desk, and amidst indignant glances from the Free Methodist saints seated on the right hand of the pulpit, he felt in his breast-pocket for the accustomed handkerchief to polish his scarlet face.

A young man of pious mien, who half rose out of his seat with a protesting growl of "Hold on there!" was pulled unceremoniously backward by Mr. Flieger, and quieted with an audible whispering in the ear.

There now appeared in the doorway the Free Methodist Evangelist. His wife and nine children came trooping after. The

pale mother, with her six-weeks' infant in her arms, sat down in the Amen Corner, while her eldest born, a pinched and care-worn Martha, guided the younger children to the left of the pulpit. With the exception of the father, apparelled in a yellow linen duster, and the infant, wrapped about with a scrap of shawl, the entire family was dressed out in rusty black.

"Good-mornin', Brother Stamper!" observed the man of Christian faith; but the deep flush in his face belied the sprightliness of his tone.

"Good-morning, Brother Crimp."

The two men looked at each other. The audience stared with hard intensity. Some in the rear of the room stood up, and others craned their necks to see. Even the flippant breeze at play without stopped to listen.

"I believe I see you in the wrong place, Brother Crimp," said the Free Methodist, mildly.

"I guess you're mistaken, sir. My place is behind this desk, and I propose to stay here." Mr. Crimp's countenance was red with wrath.

Mr. Flieger sprang to his feet with violence. He had been fuming in his seat for some moments, and could sit still no longer. "Look-a-here! What in Sam Hill do you take us Free Methodists for? Us sisters and brethren ain't to be fooled out of our sermon so easy! We come here a-purpose to listen to Brother Stamper's preachin', and if Brother Stamper ain't a-goin' to be let preach, then we'll stampede back to our homes, and spend the rest of the day in holy communion with the Lord. Us sisters and brethren——"

"Hold on, Brother Flieger!" expostulated Brother Stamper, "I'm willing for you to listen to the brother, and the whole congregation, too. I'd as lief listen myself, for a change."

Mr. Crimp's eyes shot green lights. Magnanimity, except on his own part, was distasteful to him.

"There seems to be some mistake about this here preachin'.

"Accordin' to my ears, and I guess I've got just as good hearin' apparatus as any Free Methodist here, it was give out last

Sunday that Sophocles Crimp, senior, was to hold this here platform in this here school-house to-day. I've got my sermon ready prepared. But I don't propose to be hoggish about it. I move we refer the matter to the school board. I'm willin' to abide by their decision," said Mr. Crimp, pleasantly. "Eh, Brother Stamper? Ain't that square?"

Since the august body referred to consisted of but one Free Methodist and two of his own flock, Mr. Crimp felt perfectly safe in proposing a settlement of the difficulty by arbitration.

The school board retired to the entry with a great stamping of cow-hide boots.

The result of a whispered consultation was a decision in favor of the Campbellites.

Brother Stamper smiled feebly, and backed off from the pulpit. But Mr. Flieger was made of different stuff. He put on his hat, with an angry clap, and as one man the entire Free Methodist congregation rose, and straightway made for the door.

A voice seldom raised in religious controversy now made itself heard above the

clatter, and arrested those going forth; some who were already outside came back, and put their heads in at the door. Mr Bunt, a man not to be bound by creeds, moved that the united congregations listen to two sermons, the first by Brother Stamper, the second by Brother Crimp; and further proposed that the question be settled by a rising vote.

The vote was speedily taken. The majority signifying their willingness to listen to two sermons, both Free Methodists and Christians remained in their seats, and the long-delayed services began.

Mr. Crimp, with tilted chair and folded arms, and head thrown well back on his shoulders, tolerated the sermon that followed; his features were set in a contemptuous smile that became them well.

The spare figure of the Free Methodist preacher stepped forward; his linen-duster flapped about his knees; the long, lean hands that hung far out of the shrunken sleeves, the yellowed cadaverous visage—gave him the look of having lain out in the weather. He began to speak, and the tones

of his voice were husky, further deepening the impression. Salvation was his topic.

He was going to speak to the people in the simple words of the Gospel. Lord help them to speak and to hear nothing but the simple Gospel! There was lots of preaching that hadn't nothing about salvation in it; there was a great deal of sending people to hell by an easy gospel; there was lots of professors of religion, even some that stood behind the sacred desk, that talked and smoked and spit like sinners, and went to hell like sinners. All them that professed religion hadn't got it. If they'd got religion it could be told in them by their lives, and by their conversation. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Let them ask a man if he'd got salvation, like he done once, and let them get for an answer, like he done, "You bet!" They could be mighty sure that man didn't know the first thing about salvation. Lord deliver these young friends from turning the grace of God into lasciviousness! He frowned around upon the youthful portion of his audience, who, without respect for

the preacher's presence, saw fit to be entertained rather than convicted by the warnings thrown out. Once launched into exhortation, he ceased to be irresolute; his voice had been steadily rising, and already his tones were louder than the size of the auditorium demanded. Ah, if those young friends had religion, that would learn them how to laugh! There was two kinds of laughing—laughing when you'd got religion and laughing when you hadn't got it. Their kind of laughing hadn't got the ring of religion to it—the way they was laughing was the way of the devil. If those young friends of his had got salvation they'd be laughing the other way, because they'd be so happy they couldn't help theirselves. Ah! salvation was a sweet comfort and consolation in this hard life! His Christian father and mother had salvation, especially his mother. When they'd got it, they wouldn't have no room in their heart for nothing else; it filled them full, bless the Lord! From the minute he was converted—ah—he hadn't cared for the things of this world! He'd been intent on the Father's business!

He cared more for saving souls than he did for worldly prosperity—ah! He hadn't had none of his loved ones to weight him down, neither. His wife was of his way of thinking, bless the Lord! And his little ones was of his way of thinking!

Mrs. Stamper, in the Amen Corner, was visibly moved.

The way to Heaven wasn't an easy way. No, he would warn his beloved, the way to Heaven was strait and narrow, like a barbed-wire fence. But the Lord's way was their way, and the Lord's work was their work, and they was all happy in it. Blessed be His holy name forever!

Fervent laughter and amens swept the room. From the depths of a black calico sun-bonnet in the Amen Corner there was fired at regular intervals the sonorous phrase, *Glory be to God!* The preacher's voice had deepened into a steady roar; he gesticulated with his long arms.

When they saw a young lady going with one young man—ah—more than with the others (tittering from the young people), they knew very well that, though she hadn't

said nothing, her heart had singled out that young man from all the others, and that he was more to her than all the world besides —ah. So it was with religion, when they'd got it. Religion ought to have their best love and their best thoughts, and their best work—ah! Oh! if the converted only showed the same spirit about their Father's business—ah— that they showed to those they gave their love to on earth!

When he was looking for a wife—ah—he used to sit in church and watch the one he loved—ah (more tittering from the young people)—and many a time he saw her look across the aisles at some other young man. There was such a thing as spiritual coquetting—ah! Oh! How many were coquetting with the world to-day! Men and women loved darkness rather than light. Oh! How many were flirting with the dark! What would they do when the world gave them the go-by? Those flirts and coquettes, where would they go in the next life? There was a place prepared for such as them; a lake of fire and brimstone for them to drop into like millers. Where

would their home be in that next life? *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

Deep groans issuing from the Amen Corner were echoed from different parts of the room. The preacher, bellowing and stamping, continued his portrayal of the divine economy of the lower regions, with all his might, striving to thrill the latent emotions of the unconverted, and thus bring them to conviction. The young people were awed into temporary gravity; they exchanged glances and smiles to assure one another of their unshaken scepticism. Mr. Crimp, alone unmoved, smiled to himself in a superior way. The vibrations shook from its insecure fastening a raised window sash; it fell with a bang. Two or three of the younger children lifted their voices into a wail, terrified as much by the expression of deep melancholy settling upon the countenances of their parents as by the prolonged uproar.

The preacher paused in his elocutionary labors, wiped his eyes, and began again, in tones spent by strenuous exertion.

"I preach more than salvation—ah! I preach sanctification! It's a stumbling-block to fools—ah—the doctrine of sanctification, but, bless the Lord! *our* eyes are opened to it till we can see it as plain as day.

"What does the good Book say? 'Our old man is crucified with Him (Christ) that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is free from sin.' So you see that us living brethren and sisters can be mighty sure, if we live right, that we're dead to sin and free from sin.

"What *is* sanctification?" shouted the preacher. "Is it to be saved—ah? Is it to get to Heaven—ah? Bless the Lord, it's more than to get salvation, ha, ha! It's more than to get to Heaven! It's to live without sin—ah! It's to be holy—ah! Holy like the angels in Heaven, that can't be let to sin as long as they're in the grace of the Lord!

"'Go and sin no more,' says the good Book.

"'Being made free from sin, ye become the servants of righteousness.'

"'Henceforth ye shall not serve sin.'

"'Let no sin therefore remain in your mortal bodies.'

"'If thou wilt be perfect,' says Christ to the rich young man. The Lord knew that young man could be perfect, and He knows that we can be perfect, too, my beloved. There's no excuse for us if we ain't. We mustn't stop at being *good:* that ain't enough; we must aim higher; we must become holy. O, brethren—ah! O, sisters—ah! seek the Lord this day, and give Him your unsanctified hearts to cleanse from *all* sin and *all* evil and *all* unrighteousness—ah! Cast off the shackles of your sin, and come and sit on the right hand of the sacred desk, and swell our circle here! Come and join these brethren and these sisters! We claim holiness! And we've got it, too; ha, ha! We live without sin! We haven't got no anger and no bad passions in our hearts! We haven't got no evil thoughts! No vain imaginations! Praise the Lord! Come on! There's plenty of room for all—we'll find chairs for everybody! Our circle'll stretch clean around

the room, and when everybody's in it, there won't be none to laugh us to scorn and cast slurs on us for setting up to be sanctified! We'll *all* be sanctified! Ha, ha, ha! Praise His holy name! Blessed be His holy name forever!"

The sermon ended in a triumphal flourish of amens.

The evangelist fell on his knees. All the members of his flock dropped on theirs, while those of the other fold sat upright in their seats. A strangely grotesque figure was the preacher's—great feet pointing toward the black-board; huge, bony hands outstretched; the prodigious roaring of his prayer accented by the measured smiting of his palms, held high in air.

A hymn had scarcely been sung ere one after another of the Free Methodists quickly rose, each eager to descant upon the marvellous topic of sanctification; and a testimonial meeting was at once put into full swing.

The Campbellite preacher awaited his turn, resignedly. He attempted to assume a look of infinite compassion, but this,

blending with the sneer already settled upon his features, produced an odd mixture of expressions.

Strongly excited, with rapid and incoherent speech, Mrs. Flieger led the testimonies.

"My old man is dead! I'm free! Oh, I'm so happy! Thank the Lord! Glory be to God!" (The surprising intelligence of Mrs. Flieger's widowhood provoked a storm of smothered laughter from the offenders on the benches.) "I'm saved! Glory to God! I live without sin! I'm so glad that I've been shown the way! Pray for me, everybody, so's I kin be kep' in the right way! I want your prayers! I jest wish't I could see somebody here gittin' up to give their heart to the Lord and be saved! Why can't the people care fur their souls? They're so dead in sin, 't seems like. *Git saved!* Why *don't* you git saved? Why don't you git shed of your old man? So many jest pretend to be saved an' then go on sinnin'. If you go on sinnin' you ain't saved! The devil's got you fur his own! The devil can't git no good fight out

of me, thank the Lord! Ha, ha, ha! Praise His holy name forever!"

"The Lord tells me I must speak to you about the power of prayer," gasped Mrs. Stamper, tottering to her feet. She was a woman of a singularly death-like appearance. The severity of the black sailor hat worn by most of the women of the sect, and the hair strained backward from its roots, brought out every line in the drawn, sallow face.

"I dar'sn't keep my mouth shut when the Lord tells me to speak for Him. Oh! I don't know what the people do that don't have the sweet consolation of prayer. The Lord works miracles every day in answer to prayer. The Lord tells me I must testify to you what He done yesterday in our corn-field. Some cattle broke down the fence and got in. My husband was off organizing Sunday-schools, thank the Lord, and Maria had gone to borrow some corn-meal, and the little ones was at school. I was too poorly to run the cattle out myself, so I just kneeled down in the door and prayed. I hadn't prayed more than half an hour

when the cattle went off of themselves. They didn't know the Lord was leading them, but I knew it. Oh, what a power there is in prayer! Why don't everybody quit troubling themselves about the things of this life? When their crops fail, they curse and swear. Why don't they get down on their knees? When any of the family is sick, they send for the doctor; why don't they get down on their knees? I knew a woman once that had a sick child and sent for the doctor, after she'd got tired of praying for it, and the sick child was poisoned worse than ever with swallowing the medicines the doctor give him, and he died. That woman turned her back on the Lord when she sent for the doctor, and the Lord punished her. The Lord has healed more than the doctor has! The Lord tells us it's a sin to call in the doctor, just like it's a sin to go to the dance. The Lord tells us to get down on our knees and pray. Oh! what a power there is in prayer! Bless the Lord!"

Mr. Flieger sprang up with shining face.

"I tell you it feels good to git reel good

and happy! You don't know how good it feels till you try it! One old lady that I use' to be acquainted with got so happy in meetin' that she told how she'd be perfectly satisfied if they'd let her set and look at Jesus fur one thousand years, when she got to Heaven. That's what I call reel salvation, when you feel that way." (Mr. Flieger wiped his eyes and gazed with tender emotion into the faces directed toward him.) "It makes me feel to-day like Jesus done, when he went over them mountains" (he made a sweeping gesture with both arms), "and looked down into Jerusalem. He wanted to save the people. I want to save them. I feel like I want to gether them under my wings" (another swoop) "like a hen does her chickens! But they would not be gethered then, and they will not be gethered now. They was just like the people is now—stubborn and worldly. Oh! I want to show sinners the rowt to Heaven! It's my work, I'm ready, bless the Lord! I'm just waitin' fur the Lord to tell me what He wants me to do, and I'm willin' to do it, and I'm willin' to say what-

ever the Lord puts in my mouth to say to His glory—praise be to His holy name! I want to save souls! I just feel when the spirit's on me, like it is now, that I love every soul God ever made! I love everybody here! Bless the Lord! Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Flieger closed with a prayer; he invoked blessings on the Sunday-school, for he was its founder and superintendent.

"The way to tell yer name's writ in Heaven," droned old man Wilkins, "is to be persecuted on this yearth, and talked about. When I was converted I come home, an' my first wife, she says to me, says she, 'They've ben a-sayin' things about ye, an' they've ben a-callin' ye hard names,' says she. At that I jest jumped up an' down an' hollered fur joy. 'An' what's got the matter with ye now?' says my first wife, says she. An' I says, says I: 'I've jest found out my name's writ in Heaven! I know it now! Glory, hallelujah!' says I."

Rose Rooney bundled her child into the lap of the woman next her and faced the audience, with flushed and sparkling face.

"The devil's allus a-layin' in wait fur us poor humans. He don't want us to git salvation nor holiness neither. He's awful smart, the devil is! He knows the weak points in a body's make-up! But we'd ought to be smarter'n the devil. He's allus a-layin' in wait fur me when I'm gassin', 'cause he knows it's a heap easier fur me to lie than to tell the truth. He use' to lay in wait fur Jimmy, too; but he don't git half a chanc't now. Jimmy's a right good boy—he use' to be a limb." (Jimmy, on a front seat, pricked up his ears.) "He don't swear, Jimmy don't; an' he don't chaw tobacco, like he use' to. I broke him, I did. He don't say bad words now, 'cept jist onc't in a great while. His pa learned him. But I won't have it, not in my house! Oh, Jimmy's a right good boy. It's lots easier to row down stream than to row up—it's lots easier to act bad than to act good. The Bible says so. It's human nature. I'm learnin' every day how to live more holy. Oh! we must git sanctification an' holiness—we can't see the Lord unless we have holiness—the Bible says so! I love

everybody. I don't love their sins; I love their souls! An' I love to git good an' happy! I love a religion that'll let you shout when you feel like you can't hold in! I ain't a bit afraid to shout! Oh, the jumpin' an' kickin' religion's the religion fur me!"

Rose Rooney's little Mark, ill-pleased with his sudden plunge into a stranger's lap, had cried at the change, and still fretted on being returned to his mother. With characteristic decision, Rose Rooney on the spot treated her audience to an exhibition of parental discipline; holding the child out at arms' length, she administered a series of smart shakes, at each demanding, through closed teeth, "Quit it! Quit it! Quit it!"

The wearer of the black calico sun-bonnet now arose in the Amen Corner; she was tall and angular, with aquiline features; and with the intolerance of the old for giddy youth, she bent a censorious gaze upon the young people, and waited for the tumult of their laughter to subside. Stretching forth her arm, she measured with her withered

hand the height of a pretty brown bonnet, trimmed with curling tips of the same shade. This article of head-dress was worn by Ruth Wood's mother, a lady of mild and inoffensive personality.

"There's many a hat and there's many a bunnit," pronounced the old lady, "that's going to be too high to get in at the gate of Heaven with. High hats and bunnits is a vanity and a sin, before the eyes of the Lord. The Lord shall take away their 'mincing feet,' and their 'twinkling feet,' and their 'gold rings,' and their 'ear-rings,' and their 'mantles,' and their 'wimples,' and their 'bunnits,' and their 'veils'; and the Lord shall give bald heads to them that does up their hair in 'crisping pins.' I was down to Denver last month to visit my sick sister. Before I left I made up my mind that the city of Denver was the city of the wicked, where Satan hath his rule. 'All is vanity, vanity of vanities.' The streets is given over to fine dressing, and the churches has more of finery in them than the streets has. I used to stand on the steps of the church where I worshipped at

and watch the women come out with bright-colored flowers and feathers on their hats, and young men with button-hole bouquets, that is going to shut them out of Heaven.

"The devil has got other ways besides fine apparel to lead the young astray, and sometimes the old, too." (Mr. Crimp now received in his turn a scathing glance from the depths of the black bonnet.) "The devil goes around to dances and candy-pullings, and picnics, and Fourth of July celebrations in petticular, seeking who he may devour. The Lord was mighty scandalized at the doings of some folks to the school-house, last Fourth. The devil was let loose that day; he run in the sack-race, and he clumb the greased pole, and he ketched the greased pig." (Curly O'Coole, the winner in the contest last mentioned, burst into a short laugh, and all the young people giggled.) "He jined in the speech-making, and he helped serve the refreshments. There wasn't a thing the devil didn't have a hand in that day. He was everywhere, and the Lord wasn't nowhere.

All our doings that ain't done for the glory of the Lord is done for the glory of the devil. I'm a prayin' and all the brethren and sisters is a-prayin' for them folks that is so set on Fourth of July celebrations—and Mr. Crimp over there is the most set of them all—to have their spiritual eyes opened for them to see their sin afore next Fourth, so's they can spend the day in fasting and prayer, as is pleasing to the Lord. I'm a-prayin' and a-wrastlin' that they'll all git salvation and all be sanctified afore that day. There's nothing that gives real joy to the heart but holiness. Nobody can't be joyous but them that's sanctified and livin' free from sin."

After expatiating more fully upon the pleasures of holiness, the speaker concluded, in an imposing manner: "I stand afore you a monument of sanctification. It's for all of us, and it's for you, too, Mr. Crimp." She then sat down and sanctimoniously folded her hands. And the gentleman thus publicly addressed reddened, and his nostrils distended with scorn.

Old man Wilkins spoke a second time.

He thrust his quid into a recess of his mouth: "There was a young lady of my acquaintance thet hed a young man to fall in love with her and marry her. Now, how did it come about that the young man fell in love with her? *'Cause she was plain and neat.* That's what we air, my brethren, *plain* and *neat,* and if we keep so the Lord will fall in love with us." (Groans and amens.. A loud, satisfied amen from Mrs. Stamper, dingy and unkempt in her black habiliments.) "Now, I don't see why it hed oughter be hard fur folks to give up thur wearin' apparel when it ain't suitable fur the faith. These fine clothes and gold rings and jooelry, they air the devil's own. They air jest one of the baits that the devil hes on his fishin' hook fur yankin' people into his kingdom with. When I wuz still of the world's way of thinkin' I hed a pair of patent-leather boots thet I wuz mighty fond of. And I hed a tall hat, too—one of these hyur stove-pipes. I wuz young then, and the young will be fools, ye know. But when I wuz converted I didn't hev two minds about my dooty. I knowed what I

hed oughter do. I kicked off them patent-leathers, and I knocked that thur shiny hat into a corner. I never wore 'em agin. Give the devil his doo, says I."

A raw-boned young Welshman rose to observe: "We're so big-feeling now-a-days that we want horthodox sermons: but horthodoxy won't save hus."

A fat young man in the Amen Corner, Job Postlethwaite by name, but nick-named "Jumbo," mumbled into his red bandanna handkerchief some such phrases as "these infidikes," and "going straight to prediction."

A solo concluded the testimonial service. This hymn, rendered by a holy young man, who remained seated, clutching the corners of his book in a tight grip, and ducking his head as he sang, set forth the journey by rail to Zion, and depicted the passenger train stopping at each station to throw off bangs, curly hair, gold rings, or other vanities that might encumber its speed.

Two long hours had worn themselves away before Mr. Crimp obtained a hearing. An ill-humored sneer wreathed his features,

but he adopted his customary tone of raillery.

"You c'n get up and leave," said he. "You c'n adjourn if you want to. It don't make the slightest difference to me. But I propose to preach in this here school-house to-day, if I ain't got but two people to preach to. I've been giving 'way all summer. Now I propose to assert my rights and preach every other Sunday." (At their leader's show of spirit the young people exchanged approving glances, and Mr. Post shook his red head theateningly at Mr. Flieger.) "There's been some pretty plain talk here this morning. Some sects don't stop at nothing when they've got a spite against you. They blat it right in your face. There's a Christian spirit for you! Never mind: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' That's Bible doctrine. I'll give them as good as they gave, now I've got possession of the 'sacred desk,' as the reverend brother calls it. I take the liberty of informing the reverend brother that this here sacred desk's mine for five days out of every week, when I'm learnin' the scholars

to read and write, and I feel quite at home behind it. I've got a corner on this desk.

" I don't quarrel with your doctrines, my friends. They're all right in their place; they're harmless; it takes all kinds of people to make a world, and it takes all kinds of creeds to make a religion. But you Free Methodists had ought to look out and not let yourselves get too fresh, roasting us Christians. Some of you folks may get a taste of roasting, yourselves, in the next life. I understand its rather warm, shoveling coal, down there."

A violent snort from Mr. Flieger warned the orator to desist from this theme.

" You Free Methodists claim to be holy," said Mr. Crimp, banteringly. " Now, you'd ought to be careful, you know, and mind your P's and Q's. There's goin' to be a pretty sharp look-out for any stray sins of yours layin' loose around here. I guess we know a sin when we see it, if we do dress a little better'n our friends in black, and wear ribbons on our hats and climb greased poles, and serve refreshments along with somebody who it ain't polite to mention. I'm

not afraid of the Lord's takin' a mental inventory of the duds I've got on. I guess the Lord has got other business on hand besides snatching the girls bald-headed for puttin' up their hair on curl-papers. So the Old Harry was associating with our crowd last Fourth, was he? We wasn't aware of the fact, now, was we?" facetiously inquired Mr. Crimp, as he deliberately winked in the direction of his young disciples. "I guess we're not quite so well acquainted with the gentleman's personal appearance as *some* folks seem to be; since we weren't aware of his presence, until told of it. *Some* folks not only knows him by sight, but also has a speaking acquaintance with him, it seems. But I am surprised" (with gravity) "that anybody should have mistook my young friend here, Mr. Curly O'Coole, for the gentleman from the lower regions. There don't seem to be much resemblance between the two, so far as I c'n see."

The young people were by this time so convulsed with laughter that the speaker was obliged to pause some moments.

When the room was quiet once more, Mr. Crimp went on, greatly mollified:

"I promised myself to give you a treat, my good people, in the shape of a missionary lady from India—a returned missionary, you know. I hoped to give you a pleasant surprise, for I know you'd all like to see a foreign missionary and hear them speak. She promised to come out here and speak at the school-house in the morning, and at Arrowhead in the evening; that was the arrangement. But yesterday when I went to the house where she's stopping at, to see about the appointment, I found her prostrated, and I see it was impossible to think of bringing her out here. This lady is in very delicate health; she has neuralgia of the stomach, and you know anybody with that complaint ain't liable to enjoy very good health. I'm sorry for you, for I know you're disappointed at not seein' her. I did all I could—borrowed a buggy to bring her out in, and had my trip to the Springs and back for nothing. However" (smirking), "I wasn't altogether disappointed, for I had the pleasure of bringin' out a very nice

young lady along in the buggy with me. She was my niece; but I must say she was a very pretty young lady, if she was a relation of mine."

Toward the close of a lengthy address, delivered in much the same strain, Mr. Crimp said:

"I have made mistakes in my life, like other men, and I am sometimes sorrowful on account of the mistakes of my life. But I am happy and glad to be living. Life is full of work to do. Things don't stand still these days—the world's humming! And I thank God every day of my life that I'm here to help make it hum. I am what they call of a sanguine temperament. You've noticed, haven't you, when the sun is shining, how the furthest side of the clouds is always the brightest? Well, it is my way to be on the look-out for the silver-sheen; in other words, to look on the bright side of life. But I never get excited. I pride myself on bein' superior to the sway of emotion. I guess there is some Spartan blood flows in my veins. I am different from most people, and I take things dif-

ferent. Some call me cold and unsympathetic, but I am not that. I am of a serene temperament. Call things by their right names, you know. Some say this and some say that. Folks seem to be awful busy with my name, now-a-days. Some say I haven't got any friends. My good people, that just shows how much you know about it. Why, I've only got to go to the Springs to meet hosts of 'em. I refer you to the Springs for references. There ain't a man in that town is better known than I am. There ain't a name in Colorado Springs to-day is more highly respected than the name of Crimp. It's good to blow your own horn, sometimes" (glancing defiantly around at his Free Methodist hearers). "There ain't nobody else will blow it for you. If you want to know what it means to have your reputation up, just step into a bank some day. My mere name is good for five hundred dollars on a note at any bank in the city. Yes, some people are out with me because there ain't nothing of the Free Methodist in me; I'm too serene. Now, I never could make a good Free Methodist. I can't shout

and get happy like you folks call it, when you laugh at things that ain't funny. I consider this emotional religion ain't got much more to it than the froth on the top of a milk-bucket—that's the way I look at it. I don't tie to emotional religion, myself. My religion lies deep—there ain't no froth to it. Still waters run deep, you know. I fancy ex-Governor Waite has got a temperament something like mine. I'm an admirer of that man. I've watched his career down there in Denver. There's a man that ain't appreciated like he'd ought to be. He's got some sand to his make-up; he's level-headed; he's hopeful; he's got a vein of humor of his own; he's something of a philosopher. Yes, I fancy Waite and I would make a pretty good team.

"I am a gentleman and a scholar," bombastically announced Mr. Crimp. "I am a man of brains and culture. I never prepare my sermons. I speak from inspiration. I study the human specimen as I see it about me. And I read. Then I am ready to preach my sermons, extempore, whenever I'm called on. I'm never at a loss for a word and I never run out of ideas

—my brain teems with 'em; I can go on *ad infinitum.* I evolve my sermons out of the people around me, and out of what I read. I unroll them, as it were. My reading is wide. I don't see a daily paper any oftener than the rest of you do, but I keep up with most of the magazines of the day. It's a little saying of mine that the magazines has more meat in them than the dailies has. For deep reading, at present, I'm dipping into Darwin's 'Origin of Species.' It's a noble work, that of Darwin's—one of the finest books of the age. Darwin—he's the man that wrote it—makes out that mankind is progressing from one state to another, and getting a little higher up all the time. He says there wasn't any creation, and there wasn't any Adam and Eve, and all that. He says when man first started, he was a protoplasm; in other words, a cell.

"πρῶτο"—first
(wrote Mr. Crimp on the black-board),
"πλάσμ"—cell, prison-cell.

That's the Greek of it—first prison-cell of man. Then he evolved into a sponge, then

into a monkey; and then into man, noble man. But he ain't perfect yet. He's got to keep on evolving till he's perfect, if it takes millions and billions of years. This is a very different kind of perfection" (jeeringly) "from what you folks that claims holiness aims at. No, my good friends, this is the doctrine of evolution. Darwin, he's the founder of the doctrine. We don't need to swallow it whole, you know. We can take it as an allegory, or as a parable, and deduce some lessons from it. It's got some good sound horse sense in it, that won't do us any harm. Now, we people of Windy Crick, we're in a process of evolution—we're *evoluting*, as you might say. Darwin's book is a little deep. If I wasn't afraid it would be beyond your depth I'd be tempted to quote you some extracts from it. But you'll grow up to it in time; you'll evolute. We never stand still, you know; we progress forward, or we progress backward; we prograde or we retrograde. You young folks are prograding, all right. Sorry I can't say the same of you old folks, as well. I'm sorry to have to say it, but some

of you old folks seems to be evoluting the wrong way; kind of a back-sliding evolution, I should call it. Never mind! It'll be all the same a hundred years hence. Still" (sighing), "I feel disappointed. I had hoped better things of some of the older members of my flock. Do you want to know who you folks reminds me of? Why, Ignorance, to be sure, the dolt that Christian had the conversation with near the end of his journey to the city of Zion. The trouble with Ignorance was, he had too much religion. He had soaked himself in it, and he had went mad over it; he was all puffed up with it; he had went blind from self-conceit and vain-glory; he knew it all, and Christian couldn't learn him nothing; he was one of your sanctified sort, Ignorance was," said Mr. Crimp, feelingly. "Some of you folks that's so sure of yourselves, claiming holiness and all that, may find yourselves in the same fix as Ignorance, some day, at the very gate of Heaven, feeling in your pockets for the certificate that you haven't got—you may find yourselves bundled off to the side door in the

hill, and dumped down to that place you're all so fond of mentioning before polite company.

"Speaking of 'Pilgrim's Progress' reminds me of an article I was reading only yesterday—Gail Hamilton's 'Valley of the Shadow of Death.' I want to speak of that Valley this morning. 'From the fulness of the mouth the heart speaketh,' you know. In this article that I was reading, Mrs. Hamilton tells her experience in the Valley. It come to her when she was very sick. She found herself alone, walking in the Valley, and she naturally give herself up for dead. But she come to, again, and now her health is as good as ever. Now, as a student of the Bible, the conclusion that I draw from this story is this: You can experience the Valley of the Shadow of Death in your lifetime. When I was a child I was learnt that the Valley come just before Death, and couldn't come at no other time. But I think different now; I think it comes to some in the midst of life. Let me read to you that beautiful Sam wrote by David." (In a loud voice the preacher read the Twenty-

third psalm.) "Now, David, he experienced that Valley in life, and this Sam proves it. If you'll call to mind that sermon I preached where the prophet said to David, 'Thou art the man'! and pointed his finger at him, you'll see that David found himself in the Valley then and there. When we're in great trouble in the midst of life, we're standing in the Valley of the Shadow. I have had my experience of that Valley. I have underwent great trials in my life, more than most people give me credit for. I recollect once in my life" (Soph Crimp moved impatiently in his seat at this the fourth repetition of the story, and those nearest him heard him mutter, 'Oh, shoot!') "of standing over the grave of one of my little girls—my oldest little girl, in fact. I realized that I cared more for that little child than for anything else on this earth, perhaps. And for a moment it seemed to me like I had rather give up life right there; I didn't care to go on with my life. It seemed awful easy to give up and die." Mr. Crimp choked and paused, winking hard. But his simulated agitation

was stared out of countenance and he went on hurriedly. "That was my experience of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. I walked it from one end to the other. Then it seemed to me like God was telling me to leave that little grave and take up the burdens of life again. I knew I had duties to perform—one of them had me by the hand that very minute, in the shape of my boy, Soph. But I want to say this: From that time to this, death has never seemed the same to me that it used to before the day that I stood beside the portals of that little grave."

The flow of Mr. Crimp's oratory might have continued all day had not the restless stirring of his audience penetrated even to his dense perception, and reminded him of the possible existence of cramped legs and aching backs.

After singing "God be with you till we meet again," a hymn in which both congregations joined with a will, the meeting broke up at the hour of a quarter past two in the afternoon.

VII

A DANCE

Revelry in Windy Creek began at an early hour in the evening, nor did it cease until the dawn. Eight o'clock found the Bunt cabin lighted up, the doors wide open, a crowd inside. But the neighbors, though met together, were not mingling in social ease; bunches of eager girls huddled together, whispering and tittering, now and then rushing out of doors to get drinks of water or tell secrets. The men stood awkwardly apart; conversation there was none; they were waiting for the dance to free them from the stiffness that held them in thrall.

The household furniture had been cast forth bodily into the yard, and around the four sides of the room planks were laid from chair to chair. The cracks along the rough board floor had been freshly planed. Two

hand-lamps illumined the room; a tallow candle in the kitchen showed the long pine table spread with pies, boiled ham, cold buttered soda biscuits, and cakes baked in milk-pans; and, in a dim corner, a bed with a double row of infants packed within.

The night was dark and moonless; the chill air blew in at the open doors; the smell of boiling coffee pervaded the rooms. Ruth and Hermia Wood, who had come to the dance under the protection of Ruth's brother, shivered and wrapped their cloaks about them.

Soph Crimp came late with the Bittern sisters. Their arrival created a general stir of interest; every head was turned, and as the three walked in together they encountered the lively stare of a roomful. The faces under the old pink fascinators, though blemished with powder, were sweet with an expression of innocent happiness. Close in his daughters' wake dodged Dan Bittern's ferret face. He carried in his hand a brown gallon-jug, and this, with a prowling air, he deposited underneath the table in the kitchen among a collection of similar pottery.

A Dance

At the scraping of the fiddle in Raleigh Post's hands there was a shuffling of feet; men and women drifted together as if a spell were broken; the company awoke, summoned by the sounds into sudden life and action. In a trice a space was cleared down the centre of the room. Curly O'Coole, wag and chief caller-off of Windy Creek circles, shouted, "Get your pardners for a square dance!" The floor rapidly filled with couples.

Two sets were formed; the caller-off with Betty Flieger, her cheeks a flaming match to her rose-colored ribbons, led in one; in the other Soph Crimp and Diantha Bittern were leading couple. Mr. Crimp handed out Estelle Bittern—for the Campbellite preacher sometimes honored a dance with his presence, and had a pleasant way of indulging in the diversion himself now and then. Polly Bunt had for a partner Hal Hopper, and her brother Alonzo, resplendent in a pair of carpet slippers, appeared on the floor with Mrs. Mort Post, flaunting a waist of magenta red.

All the women wore high-necked and

long-sleeved dresses; the reverse would have been shocking to Windy Creek's code of morality.

"Another good-lookin' couple wanted here!" shouted the caller-off; and Ted Bunt, blushing, handed out Olympia Flieger, now a young lady of thirteen and a half, with her hair done up high.

"All full!"

The fiddle struck up; the shuffling feet fell into time; the caller-off jigged and clapped his hands, crying, facetiously, "Ev'rybody rag!" Another moment and the quadrille was in full swing; bending and swaying, bowing and sliding, the dancers pranced through the figures, obeying with ease the orders of the caller-off, who half sung, half shouted the calls:

"All honor to your pardners,

"And honor on the corners!

"All join hands and circle to the left.

"Left alla-man, right hand to your pardner, and grand right and wrong.

"Once and a half with an elbow swing and keep a-hookin' on."

Actively observant of the rapid changes

in the last figure, the caller-off reminded the men of the approach of their original partners by snatching Betty off her feet and bawling:

"Swing your turtle-dove! Swing her pretty!"

"First couple lead out to the right," shouted the caller-off.

"Lady 'round the lady,
And the gent so-lo:
Lady 'round the gent,
And the gent don't go."

When all four couples in each set had successively galloped through the mazes of this figure, the call,

"Lemonade eight,
And you'll get straight!"

untwisted the dancers and sent them promenading in a circle, two and two, and a loud whistle and a yell or cat-call brought both fiddling and dancing to a sudden stop. After a brief respite spent in mopping brows and adjusting loosened hair-pins, somebody roared, "Start the animal!" and they

all went at it again, harder than ever. Often each quadrille had as many as half a dozen changes, so that the same set occupied the floor from ten to twenty minutes before retiring, quite blown, to give place to others already paired off and waiting impatiently about.

Alonzo Bunt flung out his carpet slippers as if heels were quite separate from his anatomy. Betty Flieger bounced heavily, with immovable gravity and precision. A tall man, with high, round shoulders and bullet head, hopped through the figures with her.

Curly O'Coole skipped and shouted:

"Swing the left hand lady,
For she's an old maidy,
And all chaw hay!"
"Swing your honey, hey, don't you know, sonny,
Swing that girl with the cracker-box feet!"
"On to the next and swing,
Misses O'Flannigan;
You do it so well you can do
It aganigan!"

The swing, evidently a favorite with the caller-off, was a whirl round and round,

each girl being lifted bodily off her feet in the rapid revolution.

"Forward two and back again,
Forward two and pass right through,
And swing that girl behind you."

In the "forward two" the heavy dough-face of Huldah Moss, a great over-grown young woman, met Estelle Bittern's with a sharp crack. Quick as a flash the little brown fist flew out and slapped the bungler's face. A laugh went up. Huldah Moss burst out crying, and stood, a foolish picture of distress, until whisked off in another figure. And in the rhythmic uproar of the dance the storm blew over.

The bullet-headed man, who took pastime seriously, though a dancer of many years' standing, had evidently never yet mastered the intricacies of the quadrille.

Often flustered by some old, familiar call, he would flounder clumsily, until, pushed and pulled this way and that, perchance he fell into time and rhythm again; or halted, confused and gaping, in the midst of the whirling forms, so bringing the quadrille to a dead stop, with the figure to be done all

over again. Yet he was an indefatigable dancer and put the girls to endless trouble to avoid such a helpless, scatter-brained partner.

"Ladies' dough,
A little more dough!"
"Bird in the middle and three hands round,
Bird fly out and keep a-goin' round."

Sometimes, as a rude joke:

"Ladies to the middle,
And gents to their seats!"

without warning, deprived the former of their partners, and left them stranded. But usually the caller-off dismissed the sets from the floor with the yell:

"Lemonade all to *you* know where,
And hand your pardner to a chair."

The square dance was by far the most popular on Windy Creek. Once in a while a waltz tune varied the tedious sameness of the quadrille, and the untuned voices of the dancers accompanied the fiddle with the mournful ditty:

"Where, O where, is my little dog gone,
His tail cut short and his ears cut long,
Where, O where, is my little dog gone?"

A hopping movement marked the waltz; the glide was unknown. Each man supported his partner with the flat of his hand placed, with fingers outspread, in the middle of her back, often leaving a shadowy impression thereon. The girls rested their chins on their partners' broad shoulders.

Groups of over-heated revellers rushed repeatedly out between sets to cool off in the night air.

Those sitting out a dance on the benches discussed those on the floor, indulging freely in personal remarks at their expense. The kind or appreciative word remained unspoken; the comments were usually unfeeling, scornful, prompted by envy, tainted with venom—a trait of Windy Creek society evincing its kinship to society of higher degree.

"Huh! We think we're some pumpkins, don't we?"

"Look at Curly O'Coole lookin' sweet at Betty! They say her pa up and asked him to marry her."

"Ain't Betty Flieger the dickens of a girl to dress?"

"Wonder why the grass-widow ain't to the dance to-night?"

"Didn't have no company, I reckon."

"Oh, that wouldn't phase the widow. She'd go to a dance without as quick as with it. Guess she couldn't stand it to see Jean dancin' with Art. She's dreadful jealous of Jean."

A young woman, whose partner had left her for a moment, fastened an inquisitive gaze on the Wood cousins. She was short of stature, but carried herself very straight, and she wore eye-glasses. She at once entered into conversation with them; she spoke with a Yankee twang. Were they strangers in Windy Creek? Where were they stopping? How long had they been here? When did they expect to leave?

"The Windy Creek people are so vulgar! It is all I can do to put up with them," said she, elevating a pointed chin.

She caught Mr. Crimp's eye, who was smirking and bowing to her across the width of the room. She promptly turned her back on him, saying, "That Mr. Crimp is the most detestable creature I ever met!"

"May I set aside of you?"

It was Mrs. Bunt's cheery greeting. The young woman had flounced away on the arm of her partner, and Ruth inquired who she might be.

"Her with the specs and chain stringin' over one yur? Why, that woman's the school-teacher, her that wallerped Will Spruce down to the school-house, an' had her school took away from her an' give to Crimp, thur."

Hermia's gaze travelled among the young men present.

"Is Will Spruce here to-night?"

"Him? Law, ye don't ketch Will Spruce goin' 'round to no dance whur Miss Staver's at, not if he knows hisself."

"Does he ever go with the girls now?" asked Hermia, dropping into Windy Creek vernacular.

"Not much he doosn't; no, they say Will's soured on the girls."

In reply to the cousins' query whether the floors were never waxed on the occasion of a country dance, Mrs. Bunt related an instance of the kind that had taken place

on the Divide, where beeswax, being a home product and cheap, was smeared on the planks, and " whenever you went to pull your foot up it went *kchwump!* like a cow liftin' its hoof out of the mud; folks said it sounded like they was some pretty tall smackin' went on to the dance that night."

Mrs. Bunt's interest in people was too lively and her tongue too restless to discourse long upon things; and, be the truth known, her guests were as eager to hear as she was to relate the foibles and follies of their neighbors on Windy Creek. With a shrewd twinkle in her eye, she began by inquiring how they liked Crimp, now?

He hadn't got the friends he had last yur, but that swelled head of hisn hadn't gone down none yit, so fur as she could see. What did they think of Stamper's preachin'? Fur her part, she didn't tie to Stamper's religion, neither; she didn't believe in women gittin' up in meetin' an' tellin' thur experimints!

Dan Bittern was seen emerging from the kitchen, furtively wiping his mustache on his coat-sleeve.

Mrs. Bunt nudged her listeners.

"Thur's a man that ain't goin' to last long, an' thur won't be none to shed tears at his funeral, neither. He's got the shakes bad, now. They do say he's wusser'n what he were to home, an' that's a sure sign when a drinker's drawin' near his eend. Did ye ever see a mean, sneakin' boy to kick an' beat his little dog on the sly? Well, Dan Bittern, he's that boy growed up; an' them two girls of hisn ain't no more to that cowardly critter than two pitiable, crouchin' dogs fur him to torment. Thur's them that says he's meaner sober than full; but full or sober, he's allus at it. They do say he keeps handy a wicked lookin' thing made out of twisted rope an' wire. I reckon them girls of hisn packs fresh marks of his deviltry to every dance they goes to, an' every Sunday to the school-house, too."

Her hearers, pained and shocked, gazed at Diantha and Estelle, gayly dancing; and with rising indignation asked why the neighbors didn't *do* something about it?

"Do? It ain't a easy job to stir up neighbors agin deviltry; didn't you ever

take note of that? Everybody knows that Dan Bittern had ought to be tarred and feathered an' rid on a rail—but who's a-goin' to do it? An' nothin' ain't proved on him, neither. He's that sly, he ain't never ben ketched at his deviltry, nor ain't likely to be. Nor them girls of hisn won't never give him away. Thur ain't no place but the open prairie fur them to run to when Dan gits on a rampage. Thur married sisters, Malviny and Maggie Milligan, doosn't keers overmuch what happens to Dianthy 'n' Stelle; they is that took up with their own fam'lies, an' that crowded, an' that put to it to git enough to eat. An' the girls, they won't run nowhere else. They is that proud-sperited an' high-steppin' they won't never tell no sech a disgrace on thurselves.

"But we-uns has seen things. Last week we was sca'ce of hands, an' Lon, he put over to Dan Bittern's to see about hirin' him to fork potatoes. He looked fur Dan all over the place, an' then he peeked in at the door, an' he see Dianthy a-sittin' on the aidge of the bed a-cryin' fit to break her heart. She looked up scairt like, an' they

was a blue bar riz acrost her forehead, an' her mouth were all swole from a cut on her lip. Lon, he's dretful backward with the girls, but his dander riz when he see Dianthy's face, an' he taxed her mighty sharp, but he couldn't git nothin' out of her. That pore thing hung down her head, shamed-like, an' vowed an' vowed agin she'd fell down the trap-door into the suller, an' hurt herself. Lon, he come home, a-sweatin' an' a-jawing' an' a-cussin' fur all he were worth; an' Dan, he lost his job of forkin' spuds. But you couldn't have proved it on him."

The fiddle complained in querulous reiterations of the strains from "Rabbit in the Cotton-patch" and "Little Brown Jug." There was a continuous thumping and stamping to mark the time, as the dancers settled to downright hard work. A baby now and then, more clamorous than the rest in its outcry against the discomfort of late hours, called its mother from the floor, and her partner was left to finish the figure alone.

There was an untrained grace in the

dancing of the Bittern girls. Where others trod heavily, they with springing step and nimble foot lightly tripped through the figures, and crossed and recrossed the floor and swung corners as though they moved on air. They were seen at their best when on the floor; there their Southern blood took fire; enchanted by harmonious sound and motion, flushed with social joys, an animation they never knew elsewhere transported them; their eyes sparkled, their faces flamed with light and color; happy laughter burst from their throats. They were untiring in their zest, and ever in demand; they rarely sat out a dance. To two observers on the benches the secret of their popularity was soon no secret. It was not alone for their prettiness they were sought, nor yet for their engaging manners, nor their graceful dancing. It was that they courted the masculine sense with a coquetry inborn, an instinct that must have stirred in infant breasts before they left off clinging to their mother's skirts. In the glance of the eye they wooed; by their deference they paid court; though themselves far cleverer

than the men they flattered, veiling that cleverness; hanging on every word, however trifling, laughing at every sally, however witless.

Soph Crimp joined in the dance with the ease of one long familiar with the art. The girls' lionizing, the conciliatory attitude of all, had fed his trivial mind until in social circles he had acquired a lordly and insolent air. Thrice during the night some bungling couple bumped against him, and thrice did the unlucky offenders feel the weight of his displeasure.

The supper for a time lured the dancers from the floor. Sitting at their ease, with heaped-up plates and cups of steaming coffee, the guests gave way to a general gust of merriment. All stiffness had vanished in the first freedom of the arm-encircling, rough-and-tumble dance.

A short literary and musical programme followed close upon the refreshments. After much coaxing, Polly Bunt, who was considered something of an elocutionist, was prevailed upon to recite a poem, each verse of which she ended with a flirt of a red

bandanna in her auditors' faces, accompanied by the spirited words:

"When *this* old flag was noo!"

Claude Fairley, having now arrived at the vivacious stage of tipsiness, volunteered a song. Somebody pounded on the floor.

Encouraged by the loud applause, he stepped forth, and, while tapping his foot on the floor to mark the time, began to sing, in loud, monotonous tones, interspersed with grins, a foolish set of verses, whose burden was:

"O girls, why don't you be good?
Get married, and do as you should!
If you don't look out, you'll die an old maid,
So rustle around or get left in the shade!"

With an air of gallantry, Soph Crimp waited on Diantha; he was plainly a youth fancy-free; but, as already whispered about, it was otherwise with the radiant girl at his side. When Soph carried away her cup and plate she left her seat to speak to the Wood cousins; in the midst of her own pleasure, not unmindful of their strangeness.

"Sometimes the boys gives you their arm when they goes to take you out on the floor, and sometimes they doesn't," said she in a voice that vibrated with happy excitement. "I was to a dance when we first come to these parts and wasn't much acquainted. And my pardner went to take me out on the floor, and he put his arm up at his side, and jest crooked it, so, and I 'lowed he aimed to give it to me; so I went fur to take it, and everybody laughed. I never was so plagued in my life. But he looked back and talked to me jest as cool, when we walked acros't the floor, and I 'lowed if folks laughed like that at things out chur, and wasn't polite like, I hadn't ought to care; so I laughed too, but I was awful plagued."

The music struck up. A young man with a pleasant, firm face, came up to claim the speaker for the next quadrille. The cousins had noticed his unobtrusive admiration of Diantha, and had been contrasting his manners with Soph Crimp's spoiled, important airs. This was Phil Schuyler, the foreman of a large cattle-ranch beyond

Arrowhead; he was considered a great "catch," but he had never yet seriously settled to the business of wife-hunting.

The drinking had been sly at first; but as the night advanced it was carried on more openly, and the visits to the jugs under the kitchen-table began to be attended with a noisy sort of hilarity.

The dancing, too, had grown rougher in character. One figure, which should rightly have been a pretty thing, the now wildly mirthful dancers distorted into a grand romp; this was the grapevine twist, metamorphosed by the Windy Creek young people into a tussle not unlike the game of "crack the whip." As the ring of dancers, twisting in and out of the archway formed by the leading couples' clasped hands held high overhead, pounded along, without regard to time or rhythm, each jerked onward by those ahead and tugging at those in the rear, Betty Flieger stubbed her toe in a knot-hole and fell face downward on the floor; in falling, amidst smothered cries and shrieks of laughter, she hauled down half the ring in a struggling heap.

A Dance

"Ladies bow,
And gents show them how!"

Two couples formed a star with eight hands across; at "ladies bow" the girls' heads were encircled by the clasped hands of the men; at "gents show them how" the girls threw their arms over the men's lowered heads, and the call, "Shake 'em up!" sent the four jumping round in a circle, until the heads within the encircling arms were swimming. This figure called for a general mauling, and a retreat on the part of the feminine portion to pin rents and to put up their tumbled hair always followed, while the boys emerged scarlet and panting, collars rumpled and neckties awry.

As animal spirits grew rampant and decorum decreased, the swing assumed a wilder and more bacchanalian aspect. Two cow-boys in from the range, tough of muscle and tall of stature, spun their partners until the girls' heels struck the door-knobs. Waxing half-mad with excitement, a spirit of rivalry seized them, and they laid a wager on the exploit.

One of the girls thus lightly treated was Polly Bunt, the other, Estelle Bittern. All other dancing ceased, though the fiddle played on furiously. Spectators gathered around, and jests and rude laughter passed from lip to lip. "Now we've got 'em goin' South!" yelled one of the rivals. "Now she's workin'!" bawled the other.

"Cheat or swing" was a favorite, though not always a safe figure for the inebriated, as it demanded a cool head and a steady temper.

Choosing between the orders:

"Swing 'em if you love 'em,
Cheat 'em if you dare!"

Alonzo Bunt, instead of swinging Mrs. Mort Post, grappled with her partner and attempted to whirl him; he chanced to be the bullet-headed man; dazed by the sudden onslaught, he resisted, and both came crashing to the floor, amidst roars of laughter.

The gale of merriment raised by this accident had scarcely subsided—the figure was becoming frightfully mixed, for in its be-

wildering maze the coolest often lost their presence of mind and forgot whom to cheat and whom to swing—when Dan Bittern and Claude Fairley, both fuddled, making for the same girl, collided, clutched, and crashed heavily to the floor, snarling and swearing. The floor rapidly cleared. Women retreated to the kitchen or jumped up on benches, while the men dragged apart the drunken disturbers, thrust them to the door, and kicked them out into the night.

Fights of this sort were of such frequent occurrence as to provoke little comment, much less to break up a dance. The fiddle took up its strains anew and the dance went on, albeit in soberer cadence after the dampening effect of the quarrel.

VIII

TWO WEDDINGS

Before sunrise of a frosty morning two riders left the main road and galloped up to the Crimp claim—a quarter-section that had its history; entered under the Homestead Act by an impoverished Free Methodist, the Campbellite preacher had jumped it, a circumstance that had not a little to do with the sudden decline of his popularity.

Early though it was, there were signs of life about the place. A cock was swelling and crowing in the yard, his strut an impertinent copy of the preacher's own gait. Thin, bluish wreaths of smoke curled upward from the stove-pipe, and there was a loud frying sound inside the cabin.

The man dismounted and rapped smartly with the handle of his cowhide.

Mr. Crimp flung open the door. The smell of frying bacon rushed forth, and Soph, with floury face and fingers, looked up from the sheet-iron camp-stove.

"Why, hello, Art! Out early this mornin', you and your lady!"

Mr. Crimp was unshaven and collarless; his crumpled shirt looked as if it had been slept in.

"Howdy, Mr. Crimp," replied Art Post, for he it was. "Kin you jine us two?"

A sly smile wrinkled the brow of the preacher; he glanced comprehensively at the young man's companion, who at the moment, in subduing the unbroken spirit of the colt she bestrode, had her back toward him.

"Cert'nly, cert'nly, Art! Anything you ask's granted on the spot. But how in the dickens did you get the girl off without the old lady givin' chase? Pretty cute fellow, Art. *You're* all right."

The woman had now mastered her bronco's will; she faced about, laughing.

"Jerusalem!" said Mr. Crimp. "Jiminy Christopher! If it ain't the grass-wid—

Mrs. Despard. Well, I'll be switched. What's went with that there little Jean of yourn, Art? Ain't gone back on you, has she?"

The young man choked out a vindictive oath.

With a click of the tongue Mr. Crimp took in the situation. "'I see,' said the blind man. Give you the slip, ain't she?"

"Married yesterday to the Springs," snarled Art, showing his teeth.

"I see, I see. So you mean to pay the girl off by unitin' yourself in holy matrimony to Mrs. Despard, eh? I admire your spirit, my young friend," clapping him on the shoulder. "I always knew you had plenty of spunk. But what will the old folks say—*your* folks, I mean? What will they do to me, for aidin' and abettin'—look here, Art, I don't like to disappoint you, but you know your governor is the best friend I've got out here on Windy Crick."

Art made as if to fling back into the saddle again. "There are others who would do the jining and no questions asked. The justice of the peace——"

"Great Scott, Art, don't go off mad," expostulated the preacher, alarmed. "You know I'd do anything for Art Post. I don't mind takin' risks for you, and you know it; you come to the right man. 'Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you.' That's my motto. It'll be all the same a hundred years hence. Best wishes, Mrs. Despard! Lovely mornin' for a weddin'! Come in, come in, both of you. Get my trappin's out in a minute."

Soph, grinning a good-morning, set out chairs for the visitors.

The bearing of the prospective bridegroom was fiercely determined; on his betrothed he turned a cold neglect, altogether undemonstrative of feeling. The Widow Despard, unabashed, hitched her chair to his, tucked her half-handers into his pocket, and bestowed a love-pat on his coat-sleeve.

The place had a bare, disorderly aspect, for father and son were "baching" here. On the west a sliding window dimly lighted the room. Shelves hung at either side, stuffed with paper-backed novels of the Seaside Library and Albatross editions,

and musty piles of the *New York Ledger* and *Police Gazette.* Beneath the window stood a rough pine desk; several of the poets huddled in ragged binding among its litter of crumpled manuscript, quill pens, and cigarette stumps; in incongruous union, Darwin's "Origin of Species" lay cover to cover with the "Pilgrim's Progress," and from a small Bible, bound in black leather, the preacher hunted out enough theology to support him in an easy pastorate, with a few strange characters and sounding phrases from a pocket-edition of the Greek Testament thrown in by way of seasoning. Such was Mr. Crimp's study; in this spot, with these instruments, the philosopher of Windy Creek, "deep-versed in books, but shallow in himself," "evolved" his sermons.

The preacher rummaged in the desk-drawer for the marriage service contained in an Episcopal prayer-book in his possession. As elsewhere stated, he had none of the printed forms of his own church by him; but he always took care to keep his fingers well over the inscription on the cover, lest

the little deception be discovered. "No use tellin' everything you know," he would have said.

He slipped on his coat, and, being now dressed for the ceremony, asked:

"Didn't bring no witnesses along, did you? Well, Soph here'll do.

"Got the permit? Le's see it."

Art produced the license.

"Any hurry, folkses?"

"Got to make it to the Springs and back by sunset."

"Honeymoon trip, eh? Guess you c'n wait five minutes or so till sun-up. I've got a notion in my head to perform the ceremony out-of-doors at the first clap of sunrise. Picturesque idea, you know. I always go in for the poetical side of the thing. I'd ought to have been born a poet.

'Out of the sea rose the sun.'

I've got my brain stored with lines from the poets, both great and small. Do you want to know what I call them lines that I've learnt off by heart?—*the adopted children of my brain.*

"'Beautiful were his feet on the purple tops of the mountains,' you know."

He ushered the pair out of doors; and the four awaited silently the moment of day. All was quiet. The coming sphere flooded the east with a yellow haze and drove westward the warm light of dawn, which, creeping from peak to valley, painted the mountains a pinkish hue. Pike's Peak first caught the beams of the sun, not yet visible from the plains; some metal object on the side of a distant foothill shone like a speck of mica embedded; on the brow of a neighboring hill-side the window of a shanty reflected the rays in a sudden blaze of light; another moment, and the rim of the golden ball protruded above the horizon, and Mr. Crimp opened his book.

The bridegroom stood up stiff and straight; the bride cuddled to his side and laid her cheek against his unresponsive shoulder.

As the first sun-beams touched up the ruddy head of the bridegroom and revealed the details of the bride's costume—she wore a short gown of gray calico, supplemented

by one of Art's cast-off coats—the words of the marriage service sounded sonorously on the frosty air:

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy estate these two persons come now to be joined.

If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace.

The humor of the situation here so struck Mr. Crimp as to oblige him to wink expressively before going on with the service.

Arthur Post, *wilt thou have this Woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her,*

honor, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her so long as ye both shall live?

Mrs. Despard, *wilt thou have this Man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall live?*

And each answered, the man according to his phraseology, "Yep," and the woman according to hers, "Yes, sirree!" And Art Post and the Widow Despard had taken each other for better, for worse.

The prayer Mr. Crimp omitted, for, as he said afterward in describing the scene and his own part in it, he never *could* pray without an audience.

Mr. Crimp, followed by his son, then shook hands with the newly married pair, wishing them all manner of happiness, and added an invitation to breakfast, not unwilling to convert that dull meal into a wedding repast.

"Thanks," said the taciturn Art, "we had a bite afore we started."

He placed a dollar bill in Mr. Crimp's outstretched fingers, and sprang on his horse; his bride, unassisted, leaped lightly astride of hers, and the pair galloped away.

Forgetful of the breakfast sizzling on the stove within, the preacher and his son gazed long after the riders, and each fell into revery.

Soph scattered his train of meditations first. "I say, pa, you've put your foot in it, this time."

"How's that, son?"

Soph grinned. "Won't old Post be mad, though? He won't do a thing to you."

"The old man'll come 'round all right," said Mr. Crimp, easily. Then he burst into a fit of laughter. "But I thought better things of Art."

Soph looked about for a pebble to fling at the meadow-lark singing happily on a fence-post near by, and remarked, as the little creature flew away with a note of alarm:

"You bet no woman will ever get *me* that way, pa."

On Windy Creek news travels fast. Before night everyone within a radius of five miles was discussing the details of the sunrise wedding.

"Thur's one woman that's ben made happy by Art's mittenin', if thur's half a dozen that's had thur rest broke by it; an' that woman is Mis' McLeod," announced Mrs. Bunt, in recounting the tale to an eager circle of listeners. "When that woman hearn the noos that Jean were married, she busted right out cryin', an' she kep' a-cryin' all night fur joy; she were that tickled that Jean hadn't married Art; she weren't even riled 'long of Jean's not sendin' her notice of the weddin' till after it were over. You see, it were this-a-way. Mrs. McLeod, she sent Jean to the Springs to visit her aunt fur why she were all wore out a-seein' Art an' her daughter sweet on each other an' gittin' sweeter. It use' to make that woman deathly sick to see Art jest lookin' Jean's way. Jean she didn't reely keers none fur Art; fur she hadn't

hardly laid eyes on this young widower-fellar—he's got a baby left him a year old—afore she up an' married him. 'T looked like she hadn't give him a chanc't to git the askin' out of his mouth afore she took him. Girls is queer things.

"Jean, she like to stirred up a yaller-jacket's nest out hyur on Windy Crick when she meddled with them Posts; so did Crimp, a fellar that ought to knowed better'n to have tied one of old man Post's boys to the Widow Despard. They's war 'twixt the Posts an' Crimp, only Crimp, he's fur makin' up; an' they's war 'twixt the Posts an' the McLeods; an' none of the Posts won't speak to Art, nor have nothin' to do with Art's noo wife—the old folks, nor the boys, nor the boys' wives, neither."

Rose Rooney supplied with gusto an incident of the honeymoon trip to Colorado Springs.

"Pete, he run into them two lunchin' at Delmonico's. They was eatin' like they was half starved—they'd run off without their breakfasts, I reckon. The old lady, she seemed possessed to rub her face acros't

Art's sleeve after every mouthful. She kep' a-grinnin' up in his face an' ketchin' him 'round the neck. 'T seemed like she couldn't let the fellar be. An' the waiters jist a-splittin'. An' Art settin' up straighter'n a ramrod, an' gittin' madder 'n' more red-faceder every minute. She's awful bold. The first time I ever laid eyes on that woman she says to me, 'Art Post is about the prettiest man I ever seen.' Yes, I allus knowed the old lady had her eye on Art."

Mrs. Mort Post disposed of the culprits in the following energetic fashion:

"'F I was Art, I'd send the old lady flyin' in a month's time."

"She's awful old, she's pretty near twic't as old as him," said Diantha Bittern. "Why, she's gray-headed; she's thirty-three or thirty-four year old."

Toward sundown a singular cavalcade passed along the road by the Wood claim; a young man in a two-wheeled cart, valises, bags, boxes, and bundles piled up to his knees, driving a rapid trotter; a brown-faced woman sitting her spirited bronco with ease, her scant skirts and mannish coat

flapping in the wind. The bridal procession, for such the spectators knew it to be, was seen to turn in at Art Post's gate, and to halt beside his shanty.

At church the couple made their first public appearance. It was observed that Mrs. Art Post kept her arm about her husband's waist during the entire service; and her affectionate disposition was remarked.

At high noon, two weeks after the sealing of Art Post's fate, another knot was tied. Unlike the first wedding, the second was witnessed by friends, relatives, and well-wishers, gathered together in the name of the Lord.

For more than a year past his daughter Betty's future had caused the soul of Mr. Flieger exceeding great tribulation. He had known no peace of mind; anxiety had cankered his heart. To Betty had come that momentous period of her life, by woman-an-kind soon attained, soon passed—the marriageable age. Those were moments of exquisite torture to the parent, when his imagination, as with a stereoscope, flashed

before his mind's eye views of Betty, unsought; Betty, pointed out as an old maid; Betty, year after year picking potatoes in her father's patch, rather than in her husband's. Stung to frenzy by such visions, he would exorcise by prayer the hallucinations of a disordered mind; the corral, the corn-field, the potato-patch, were frequent witnesses to his piety. He had been tormented by the question of the dance; his religion frowned upon it; but it was made manifest to the solicitous parent that the matrimonial prizes of Windy Creek were not to be won in the church, nor yet in the Sunday-school, but at the dance. Clearly, it was his duty as a father to provide a mate for his child. A husband once caught, Betty might safely eschew that form of worldly recreation, together with her big sleeves and her rose-colored ribbons. So it came about that Betty, the child of Free Methodist parents, the subject of Free Methodist prayers, moved unmolested in Windy Creek society, while her natural guardians practised a fine self-abnegation in thus sacrificing a religious scruple to a moral duty.

During the fortnight following the rupture of the engagement between his daughter and Curly O'Coole, Mr. Flieger had lost flesh; he had diminished in girth. Upon the non-appearance of the young man he had accosted Betty in tremulous tones; he had demanded the reason of her suitor's absence. Her reply, "I reckon I'll let him sweat awhile!" provoked a storm from her mother; but her father had groaned in anguish of spirit, and turned aside to seek accustomed refuge in prayer. The person of Job Postlethwaite was the substantial, the corporeal answer to that petition. The youth had been received with open arms; he had complaisantly responded to the advances of the family; had it not been, however, for Mr. Flieger's zeal, the spousal rites of the two young people committed to his care might have been postponed to an indefinite period of time. Job was not averse to matrimony. To his mind the words "wife" and "helpmeet" were synonymous; but his temper was phlegmatic. He was a youth devoid of passion, without ambition. To use Mr. Flieger's own ex-

pression, he required "boosting." Job, as a member of the family, was desirable; but Job as a constant table-guest was rather an expensive appendage. He was no light eater, having, on the contrary, an appetite proportionate to his bulk. It became apparent to the subtle instinct and clear understanding of Betty's father that nothing was to be gained by waiting; Job would never, of his own accord, commit himself; a proposal was fraught with too much uncertainty. This matter, too, was made a subject of prayer. With inspired language upon his lips, Mr. Flieger approached the young man; speaking no word that was not revealed to him by that higher wisdom upon which he leaned. His end was accomplished, his desire attained. The youth accepted the situation; he gave his consent, his blessing, as it were, quite as if the tables were reversed, and Mr. Flieger were asking for the hand of Job's daughter.

Job Postlethwaite had no cabin to offer his bride. A dug-out was his all. The potato-plants in his patch, fostered by heaven's rain and sunshine rather than by

stress of labor, brought forth the usual quantity of homely brown tubers. Neither cow, pig, nor fowl had Job; it therefore behooved him to waste no vital energy on the planting and hoeing of corn. His was not a nature to be troubled by forebodings of the future; he was without inordinate longing for prosperity; his temperament was calm, equable; some ill-disposed toward him—he had no enemies—were wont to call him lazy; but this was calumny.

The date of the wedding had been fixed, the invitations issued, the preparations for the feast begun.

During the week preceding his nuptials, Job Postlethwaite remained under the sheltering roof of his would-be parents. But rumor, always afloat on Windy Creek, whispered about that the bridegroom was ailing; stated that he had taken to his bed; and lastly affirmed his malady to be that fell disease of the parotid glands commonly known as the mumps. The bridegroom, so said rumor, had caught them while bestowing a fraternal kiss upon the young sister of the bride, debarred from school by a

light attack. The postponement of the wedding-day was prophesied. Those of the invited guests acquainted with the fame of Mrs. Flieger's Southern cookery, grew despondent. Among people outside the bonds of Free Methodist brotherhood, some were ill-natured enough to predict that Betty never would get Job now; that a wedding put off were a wedding broke off; that old man Flieger knowed what he were about when he struck while the iron were hot.

A surprise was in store for these croakers. The father of the bride-elect made proclamation that the wedding date should remain unaltered. Inquiry, conjecture, speculation were set on foot. Much talk was created. Gossip emulated gossip.

The nuptial day arrived. As the sun neared the meridian the festivities in active preparation at the Flieger homestead assailed the senses of passers-by, exciting to such a degree the envy and curiosity of some as to cause them most acute mental suffering. In the long, low-roofed kitchen, women hovered over the stove or bustled from cupboard to table. Confusion reigned.

Tongues were clacking, spoons stirring. There was a sputtering, a steaming, a hissing, a boiling, a bubbling. Guests crowded the living-room. Everyone wore his Sunday black, and every face was grave, even long; for it was a solemn occasion. Among the guests were Ruth and Hermia Wood. The presence of these young ladies, as much a surprise to themselves as to their neighbors, was due to the kindness of Mrs. Flieger, who, though opposed to their "fine dressing" and "doctoring," had disclosed to invalid Ruth an unsuspected tender side of her character.

Mr. Flieger fidgeted from one room to the other and back again. His eye roved hither and thither in search of his daughter; and when she appeared, dressed out in her bright plaid frock and pink ribbons, and pressed her glowing cheek for an instant against his, a rush of emotion dimmed his sight, for Mr. Flieger's tears, like his feelings, were but skin deep.

A closed door guarded the shed-room on the left, where the afflicted bridegroom reclined. Thither the evangelist, pausing

from his labor of handshaking around the room, followed Mr. Flieger. The door was jealously closed behind the two. Their muffled bass, at first scarcely more audible than the faint tones of the invalid, soon increased in volume; the father's agitated outbursts were mingled with the preacher's devotional roar. It became apparent that the bodily ailment of Job Postlethwaite was being subjected to a trial of healing by faith, and the voices within, raised in supplicating prayer, met with ardent response in the lively amens of the listeners without.

The test was brief. The voices died away. Brother Stamper, in his yellow linen duster, came forth and took his stand at the upper end of the room. He carried neither manual nor notes. The women suspended their culinary operations. Betty lunged in. All rose to their feet. Mr. Flieger rapped on the shed-room door; "Ready," he bawled.

A shocked murmur was elicited by the bridegroom's entrance. Free Methodists though they were, not a few of the company but found their risibilities excited by

the ludicrous appearance of Job Postlethwaite, as, shambling forward, he rolled to Betty's right, and faced the minister. The innocent cause of Job's discomfiture giggled aloud, and was promptly slapped in the face by her mother. Rose Rooney, choked by the effort to restrain her ready laughter, went off into hysterics; and this display of natural feeling on so momentous an occasion as the widening of the family circle by marriage, was regarded by all present as highly proper and commendable. Happily for them, the Wood cousins succeeded in keeping countenance. Job's legs, bowed outward, impressed the beholder with the idea that the underpinning of his structure had at some remote period of his existence given way. From frequent burrowing after the cool spot in his pillow, his hair stood on end. His eyes were swollen half-shut. His countenance, deeply flushed and bandaged round about with a crimson neckerchief, had exchanged the symmetry of its roundness for that of an equilateral triangle, and the unusual breadth from jaw to jaw lent a comical air to his physiognomy.

Betty, blushing like a full-grown peony, slipped her hand into Job's; and so this odd young pair stood up together and were married. The ceremony was brief, but the prayers lengthy. Painful grimaces distorted the bridegroom's countenance, and he now and then gave vent to a smothered groan, which, taken for a sign of the inward workings of spiritual emotion, was responded to by loud amens. Mrs. Flieger wept.

Shaken and thrilled, the voice of Mr. Flieger followed close on the preacher's. He had took Brother Postlethwaite's indisposition to the Lord in prayer. He had went to the Lord a-purpose to find out if the weddin' was to be put off. He hadn't wanted the weddin' put off, hisself, but if the Lord willed it so, why, he was willin'. He knowed how to say them words, "Thy will be done!" But he hadn't had to say them. The Lord had answered that prayer of hisn afore he had rose from his knees. The Lord had said, Why put off the weddin'? Why trouble theirselves about earthly sickness when he was there

to heal? The mumps hadn't oughter hender a marriage from bein' solemnated, no more than they had oughter hender a funeral, especially when they would leave of theirselves if there was faith enough. Oh, the Lord was good! The Lord be blessed!

Mrs. Stamper was moved to give a sample of the power of prayer, and Mrs. Flieger chimed in with another instance on the same topic; the elderly saint in the black calico sunbonnet testified to the healing by faith of a boil on the back of her husband's neck; a graphic illustration of Marky's swallowing a marble was contributed by Rose Rooney; and a fervid testimonial service threatened the festivities of the wedding. At the outset of these pious extravagances the bridegroom slipped away, groaning, to his couch; the discovery of his exit took off the keen edge from the testimonies, and whiffs of fried chicken and roast pork from the kitchen brought them speedily to a close.

The afternoon passed away in feasting; thrice in succession was the long table

filled and filled again, and there was a surfeit of eating and drinking. The bridegroom, waited upon solicitously by his mother-in-law, gazed with momentary animation into a plate heaped with the breast of chicken, mashed potato, squash, and gravy, only to find that with the most strenuous exertion he might open his mouth the eighth of an inch and no more. The good things had vanished, as they have a way of doing in this life, before Job was able once more to exercise a proper control over his jaws.

The young couple presently set up housekeeping in their dug-out. The day after her establishment in her new home, several reliable witnesses attested to having seen the bride picking potatoes out in the field while her lord and master forked them. Mrs. Art Post, too, it was said, had a liking for the occupation. Picking potatoes is no uncommon industry with the women and children of the rain-belt, and brides, for the sake of being near their husbands, as well as to ward off incipient attacks of homesickness, take to it with avidity.

The first Sabbath after the wedding, a new member was received into the fold. Whatever may have been her change of heart, a striking metamorphosis in her external appearance marked Mrs. Postlethwaite's entrance into the church. Her frizzes were laid low, her ribbons discarded, her stays abolished; her full sleeves, the pride of her simple heart, she had cut down and fitted close to her plump arms. To quote Polly Bunt, the latter resembled "stuffed bolognys, an' looked jest awful." One other step sufficed to sunder the ties between Betty and her former playmates; this was accomplished on the day that Betty seated herself by her husband's side in the Amen Corner, thus tacitly assuming the sublimities of sanctification.

"She's awful changed," complained Polly Bunt. "She don't go to dances no more, an' she don't go a-visitin', an' she don't have nothin' to do with the young folks. She's growed old all to onc't. If that's the way folks act when they git religion, I ain't never goin' to git none, so there!"

IX

THE COME-OUTERS

It was evening meeting, and the people of Windy Creek were flocking into the school-house.

"Let me make you acquainted with a brother in the faith!" said Mr. Flieger, presenting a stranger in black to Ruth Wood's father. "Brother Hawkey, from Denver; he's agoin' to preach to us to-night." He added, with a heartfelt chuckle, "This is my kind, now."

And, indeed, the good man was gaining quite a reputation for changing religions; it had been said of him that he was "like a tumble-weed in a blizzard—you couldn't tell where he was at."

The Evening Light bestowed a look of severe scrutiny upon the elderly farmer.

"Have you got salvation? Have you found the Light?"

Upon the other's mild response that he had been a church member for upwards of fifty years, the brother from Denver demanded, with asperity, "The church of the *living* God?" and squared himself for a controversy that was nipped in the bud by the opportune arrival of Brother Mellon, the regular preaching elder of the district. The two brothers in the faith flew to each other's arms and saluted with a mighty kiss.

Em Post came in, hugging a heavy baby, while the superseded toddler waddled by her side, and her husband came after, empty-handed and careless. Mrs. Flieger and Rose Rooney rushed to meet her with a loud whispering and buzzing. "Let up, ma," she was heard to say. Her soft tones disarmed the words of their rudeness. "I ain't none of yer old Come-outers!"

Few outsiders disturbed the sanctity of the meeting. There was a scarcity of young people. But the Bittern sisters were present, for they went to everything. They sat alone; their father was not with them, nor was any rustic swain in their company. Estelle had decked her dress

with a profusion of little scarlet bows, tacked on in every available spot. From a red ribbon around her slim waist three door-keys dangled, in imitation of a young lady's chatelaine. Since last year Diantha's skirts had been visibly shortened. The sisters had cut off their abundant hair, and wore their short locks elaborately curled. In their rear sat Mrs. Bunt and Mr. Crimp, with his sneer, both unsympathetic listeners.

Mr. Crimp, it was said, no longer preached in Windy Creek, for the very good reason that he had no longer any congregation; so fleeting is earthly countenance. But Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do, and Mr. Crimp now made it his business to break up every Sunday-school organized in that region, before it was fairly started. He had, in addition, gained the reputation of being something of a fighter. It was told of Mr. Crimp that, when attempting to disorganize a Presbyterian Bible school just started at Brierly, he had treated the people to a "tongue-lashing," and threatened to "sweep the door-yard

with some of them." A late arrival, more spirited than the others, entering the schoolhouse just in time to catch the closing threat, pulled off his coat and started for Mr. Crimp, vowing to "swat the map with him." It was told of the Campbellite preacher that he and his grip disappeared out of the door in a hurry; and one Sunday-school was left to flourish without interference.

The eye, wandering over the assembly, lighted upon the dejected figure of Job Postlethwaite in an obscure corner, his head dropped forward on his hands, and his young wife sitting beside him.

Several infants, when hushed to sleep, were bundled in a pile of shawls behind the door. This was the Baby Corner. The older children sat with their parents; wide awake enough at first, they soon succumbed to the soporific influence of a long sermon, and dropped off, one by one.

In the year's lapse the Amen Corner had not been done away with; on the contrary, the holy individuals within its circle had, by no perceptible stages of development,

been metamorphosed from sanctified Free Methodists into full-fledged Come-outer saints.

The stranger elder from Denver was a slight, spare man, with shiny black hair and pointed chin-beard. He did not shout, nor strain for unnecessary vocal effect; he was possessed of a glib tongue and a good memory; he was familiar with a string of Scriptural phrases, and he tumbled eagerly over the leaves of his Bible in search of passages or even whole chapters to read aloud for reference. He began by scoring the church.

"Cast off the cloak of your high-pocrisy and unbelief, and leave the church with its abominations!" admonished the elder. "Seek for a holier life outside of its doors! Sling off the filth that men has covered the Christians with! *Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. II. Cor. 6:17.*

"Listen to that, you who have planted your feet on the infirm and tottering foundations of the church! Ain't that convinc-

ing? Could anything be plainer? Oh, what a wonderful Book this is for telling us what to do!

"Did you ever hear how Christian went a-climbing up to the holy city after he'd left the abominations of the world behind him? Well, that's just what the Lord wants you to do, leave Babylon behind and climb upward. The Church is Babylon. Leave it, fly from it; it's in disgrace. Stick your fingers in your ears and run like Christian done when he run from the City of Destruction. Oh, the vileness of the world. Oh, the corruptions of the church! What do you think of a preacher's wife standing up in a corner to be kissed at ten cents apiece?" (Laughter.) "That's just what happened in a church within my knowledge, not a great while ago. There's the abominations of the church for you!

"The city of Denver, where I come from" (impressively, spreading wide five fingers) "is full of churches. Yet the Christians in that city I could count on the fingers of one hand. . . .

"I don't bring you a lot of printed stuff,

got up by man. I bring the Scriptures, unchanged and unrevised, just like they was when first written by the chosen of God. I don't even have my sermon written out. I'm not preaching to you to show off my learning. I don't know that" (snapping his fingers) "about theology! And you don't miss anything by it—ha, ha! If I was to come here with a rigmarole of high-sounding, hifalutin' words, it wouldn't convert you at all; it would only make you harder!" (Laughter.) "I speak to you as the word is give me by the spirit of the Lord. I'm taught by the spirit and I teach by the spirit."

Brother Hawkey appeared to have forgotten the "Gospel Trumpet," a little paper published by his sect; or perhaps he regarded it as too slight a matter in the way of printed stuff to deserve mention. He went on:

"There's certain ordinances, dear ones, laid down by the Holy Scriptures; we're bound to obey them. And we find our greatest happiness and satisfaction in obeying them. Now, one of these ordinances

is washing each other's feet. In the thirteenth chapter of John, which I will read to you, you'll see how we're commanded to do this in memory of the Master. It's just as sacred and we're under just as great obligation to obey it as any other command in this Bible. It's beyond my human comprehension how the churches that's so strict about the Lord's Supper ever come to leave out the ordinance of feet-washing. The brethren's salutation of a kiss is another very solemn and sweet custom that has been handed down to us from the apostles. 'Greet ye one another with an holy kiss,' says Paul. 'Salute every saint in Christ Jesus.' But the most blessed of all the ordinances we're directed to obey, you'll find in James 5: 14,15. Open up your Bibles and look for it. Go home and learn off these blessed verses by heart."

He wet his fingers to turn over the leaves. "How the Bible clings together, don't it? Ha, ha!

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church: and let them pray

over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

"And the prayer of faith shall save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

"If any among you feels within them the moving of the spirit, that gives them the power to heal, let them heal the sick; and if any man of you can heal the sick, he is an elder, and nobody but elders can heal, for it's a great honor, and it isn't given to everybody to do it. Just before I came up here I went to see this Schlatter that's fooling the people down there on the streets of Denver. The street was blocked with carriages. There was a string of fools standing in line clean around the block and more a-coming. The false healer took each person by the hand as they stepped up and let on to be healing them. I was looking on and saw a blind old woman come up to be healed. And he squeezed and squeezed her hand. When Christ healed he laid his hand on the blind man's eyes. I steps up to the old woman when the healer let go her hand

and says I, 'Well, are you healed, my sister?' and she says, 'I've been treated, but I don't know whether I'm healed or not.' So that's the way it is with all these poor, deluded creatures that go to this man to be healed. Dear friends, beware of false healers! There's impostors in healing just like there's impostors in every other department. Dear friends, take heed you don't let these upstarts in the name of religion—these doctors and false Christs and Christian Science cranks—blind you till you can't see the true light. Look at the bottles and bottles of medicine, and all the different kinds of instruments that physicians and doctors use. Don't that show they're experimenting on the people they undertake to cure? Don't it? Pah! It's no better than being healed by the man with long hair down in Denver. The healer in Denver is opposed to the commands of God. The doctors are opposed to the commands of God. Dear friends, with prayer and faith, and laying on of hands, we, the humble followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, can accomplish what these impostors fail to do. It all lays in

prayer and faith, bless the Lord!" (Loud cries of Amen.)

The elder, expounding the doctrine of sanctification—his views on this topic did not differ materially from those of the Free Methodists—said:

"I've got the same salvation Paul had. My carnal nature's not here; it's gone to the devil, where it come from. If you seek salvation, dear ones, one way to please the Lord will be to drop slang and tobacco and all those nasty things. I dropped them. I don't use them any more like I once done. I threw them away with my carnal nature. Christ says, 'Go and sin no more.' He never meant when he forgave a sinner for him to go on sinning again—it's contrary to the rules of the Gospel. If you see a man that's been converted, as he calls it, and then goes on sinning, you may know he's a liar and the truth's not in him. Yes, everybody that claims to be a Christian and don't live free from sin are liars, and the truth's not in them. When I got salvation the great big I was took clean out of me. Whenever you see a converted sinner, you'll

see a hollow place in them, and you'll know that same great big I has moved out.

"I tell you what, dear friends, this religion's an enemy to worrying and fretting. I've got some wrinkles in my face, but they was there before I got salvation. I haven't had any new ones to come since. There's some good in a religion that keeps the wrinkles off. Why, I don't even think about cares any more. I left my family behind me in Denver, but that don't worry me. I hadn't thought of them until just now. They're all right—they're in the hands of the Lord. My sister there that came with me from Denver, she left her baby behind her and she hasn't thought of it until this evening—forgot she had a baby." (Laughter.)

"This religion's an enemy to fear, too. Perfect love casteth out fear, you know. If a man's afraid of anything, he's not got salvation. If a woman's afraid of a horse or dog, and claims to be converted, she's a liar, and the truth's not in her. I used to be afraid of a bull-dog, but now I could face rows of bull-dogs without winking. I'm

not afraid of anything. There's no fear in me. Why, once I went into a stall where a horse was tied, and that horse begun to kick, and if I'd been afraid he would have kicked me a belt; yes, sir, and spraddled me clean out of the stable. But I wasn't afraid of him, and I come out unharmed."

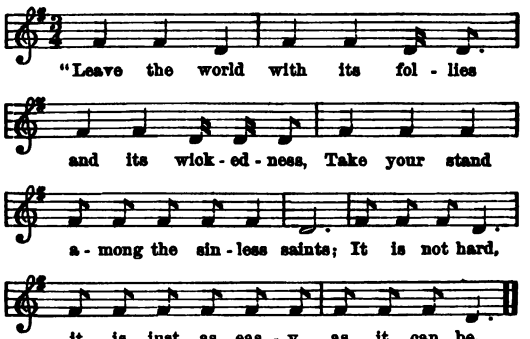
There was a great deal more of the same sort of talk. Above two hours the elder spoke at length; when words failed him he read from his open Bible long passages and sometimes entire chapters, interspersing his reading with rapid comments.

An altar service followed the sermon; there was singing and prayer; the meeting grew to be not unlike a Methodist revival. Brother Hawkey preached salvation and the cause of Christ; but some of his orthodox hearers may be pardoned for growing slightly confused when the brother in the same breath called sinners to repentance and church members to come out of the church.

One simple soul was touched—a woman left her seat and came quickly forward; it was Em Post, with her sleeping child in her

arms, a moved look on her fair, sun-burned face, her whole air one of gentle acquiescence with the brother's will; she stepped up to the circle at the preacher's right; from each woman in the Amen Corner she stooped to receive the holy kiss. A hymn of praise was sung, and room was made for the convert among the saints.

A strange sister at the preacher's right hand, a slight, black-robed figure, with a white, eager face, spoke to the people. The tones of her voice were sweet; she had a sing-song delivery that was not unpleasing. It seemed almost as though she were chanting to them:



"Dear ones, come to the Light! Dear backslider, come! The Light is shining above you; you've only to look up to see it. I and my brother came to-night to show you the Light. If we save any soul we'll give the Lord the glory of it. We'll do all we can for you, dear ones; but few there are who are saved. We're only human after all, and the Lord above has power to save some of you.

"Dear ones, you are married to the world; pray the Lord to divorce you from it; pray the Lord to back you up with His spirit; turn to Him, turn to the Light! Dear ones, Satan has rocked you to sleep; wake up and break the spell! Once I was like you; I was asleep in sin; I woke and I was peaceable nowhere; but I found salvation; I have been happy ever since. I just praise God for it; my heart is made perfect in the Lord. I don't sin; I can't sin; I don't know what sin is. I have forgotten all about it. I'm a servant of the Lord. If you only knew what it meant to be a servant of the Lord! Dear ones, try it. It is not hard; it is just as easy as it can be. I'm

willing to do anything He asks me; anything at all. Sometimes I'm asked to speak; sometimes I'm asked to work; it's all the same to me; it's just as easy as it can be. Here I can speak low; I don't have to raise my voice; in Denver I have to shout; here I speak to a few; in Denver to a crowd. I work among women most, because I'm one of their kind; I do anything I see to do; I do sewing, or dish-washing, or even scrubbing; there is nothing too mean for my hands to do. It's the work of the Lord. I used to hate some people and love others, but my natural dislike turned to love. I love them all. Try working for Him, dear ones; it will make you happy. You are sin-laden and sorrowful; work for the Lord; you will shake off your sin and forget your sorrow."

The sister spoke long and prayed, and her words and the spirit that breathed in them were more loving and earnest than any that had ever yet been uttered in the school-house.

Sister Mellon, the wife of the district elder, testified without rising. She spoke

with difficulty, and a scowl of pain knotted her brow. She had been tipped off a load of hay that liked to mired, and had to be carried home on a stretcher. She had broke a rib, she was certain of that. Brother Hawkey had been sent for, and, with him on one side praying, and her husband praying on the other, her hurts had left her, her bones had healed, and she had leaped out of bed, praising God.

A chorus of amens greeted this announcement. Job Postlethwaite, lifting his head to hearken to the testimony of the elder's wife, was distinctly heard to murmur that her bones would be mighty crooked set if she waited on the Lord to heal her. Those who heard his words looked meaningly at one another, and precipitately drew away from him.

Old man Wilkins piped up.

"They was one of my grand-children, he'd took sick abed. His ma, she reckoned he hed swallowed somethin' thet didn't gibe with his insides. When it come the third day, an' the leetle feller hadn't got no better, Brother Hawkey here, he an' me, we took

to our knees, an' we done a powerful sight o' loud prayin' an' wrastlin' afore the Lord. An' as I stan' here to prove it, afore daylight hed struck this yearth, thet leetle shaver, he wuz healed by faith."

"Amen!" shouted Mr. Flieger, starting up. "Bless the Lord! He does his healin' free! He don't dun you for no doctor bills! Oh, it makes me happy to see the sisters an' brethren get up in meetin' and testify to their healin' by faith! The healin' hand of the Lord has ben in my house this week. He has made me to be the instirment of healin'; He's give the power into my hands; I've ben a-usin' it—I've ben a-usin' it—I've ben a-usin' it to the glory of His name, bless the Lord, glory hallelujah!"

The prodigious roar made all the windows rattle. He went on again in tones slightly modified.

"Ma, there," nodding his large head in his wife's direction, "was all doubled up with pain, an' sent Olympy down to the field after me. I'd ben in a prayerful frame of mind all day, an' when I

come to the side o' the bed, I jest let out. I followed the spirit an' took no thought how or what I was to say, for the words was give me in that same hour, an' they come a-tumblin' out faster'n I could holler them. I kep' it up stiddy fur about a quarter of an hour, near as I could judge, an' then ma, she reached out an' grabbed me. 'Stop it,' says she. 'The pain's left, thank the Lord.' 'The Lord be praised,' says I."

Mrs. Flieger devoutedly chuckled and said "Amen!" And a happy laugh went round.

Mr. Flieger ended, more in sorrow than in anger, by anathematizing the Sunday-school that he had founded a year ago; it was Babylon; an abomination unto the Lord; the cage of the unclean; the habitation of devils.

"One Sunday," said Mrs. Flieger, "I see a lot of teams go by to the school-house at Sunday-school time, an' I felt like I wanted to go, too; I couldn't think what all them teams was goin' there fur, an' I come pretty nigh bein' slipped up on, fur it was the devil raisin' a racket inside of me; but

I knowed I hadn't ought to go, an' so the devil an' me had a wrastle, right there; I got down on my knees an' prayed, an' the Lord whipped. When I riz up I didn't want to go at all. I didn't care nothin' about Babylon."

Mrs. Flieger continued: "The Lord has done a heap of healin' in my house. I wasn't hardly able to do a lick when Betty was at home, I was so poorly, but now the Lord has made me strong and able to do my work, 'cept jest onc't in a while, when I git them dizzy spells. I was ironin' the clothes a-Chewsday, an' I was that tired an' weak I like to dropped; an' I prayed to be made strong so's I could put my ironin' through, an' the Lord, he laid right hold o' that iron, an' first I knowed I was rubbin' it over the clothes jest as slick as anythin'.

"The strength that we git from the Lord is worth more than man's strength. Them that swills beer an' tea an' coffee ain't as strong as them that does without an' prays. I never use' to could go to the Springs without packin' along my bottle of strong coffee to keep me from givin' out, an' the

last time I went with my butter an' eggs I packed the bottle. But when I come to take a swig of it I had another wrastle with the evil one to keep me from drinkin' the stuff, an' I prayed an' throwed the bottle jest as fur as ever I could sling it. An' I ain't never drank a drop since, nor wanted to. My first husband, he was a hard drinker. An' my grandfather, he begun his life with coffee an' he ended up with whiskey. He had him a big farm onc't, but he drank it up; he had a horse left an' he drank that up; then he drank the saddle up, an' then he drank the bridle up. He was a teetotal drunkard. Oh, the drink ain't got no holt on me, thank the Lord! Bless His holy name forever! I git so full o' blessin' the Lord I jest can't behave myself! I'd give up anythin' fur Him—I'd give up my old daddy there, if the Lord wanted me to!"

Old man Wilkins blinked at his daughter, dazzled by the sacrifice she meditated, and seemed to have lost his power of speech.

Mr. Crimp attempted to throw a wet blanket over the testimonies; he got up to

say, with bitter raillery, that the Windy Crickers were for all the world like the "Athenians" and "strangers;" they "spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing."

Rose Rooney, with a defiant air, said that there was one woman on Windy Creek that wasn't tongue-tied, and she wasn't afraid to tell right out in meetin' who that woman was, neither—it was Mis' Bunt (whereat the lady mentioned became the centre of attraction for many pairs of curious eyes, but being blessed with a comfortable opinion of herself, kept her countenance). That when she was comin' out of meetin' an' sayin', "Oh, I'm saved, an' I'm so glad," Mis' Bunt had said to her, "How d'ye know ye're saved?" an' she had said: "Why, I tell the truth, an' I don't git mad, an' I don't talk about folks no more;" an' Mis' Bunt had said: "Saved nothin'! I don't believe you're saved any sech a thing!" an' then that woman had lit into her, an' tongue-lashed her, an' come down on her like a thousand o' brick; an' she hadn't sassed her back nor nothin'; she had jes' kep' her mouth shet; the Lord had helped her.

Rose Rooney next berated the absent Pete, relating how he had gone off to Cripple Creek with a load of spuds and left her with all the work to do; an' how when he was at home, he set around and smoked while she slopped the pigs; and how he was so mean he'd take the cents off his dead grandmother's eyelids; winding up her tirade with, "A saint couldn't live with Pete, he's so ornery."

There was to-night a strange, evanescent brilliancy about the speaker. When she sat down, out of breath, the young fellow at her side smiled, under his incipient mustache. He was a youth about her own age, and there was something quizzical in his manner of taking in the meeting. He wore the usual cow-boy dress of fringed leathern breeches and flannel shirt, belted in; his sombrero lay across his knee. It was an ingenuous, boyish countenance; bronze-colored and framed with tawny hair, worn long on the shoulders.

When all the Come-outers in good standing had testified to the Light they enjoyed, and had seated themselves with marks of

evident approval and satisfaction, a huge, shambling figure in the rear of the room rose to its feet, and everyone was compelled to face directly about, in order to see and hear "Happy Jim." A body seven feet in height, and the mind of a seven-year-old, a foolish smile spreading over vapid features, he stood eying the people while he jingled some loose coppers in his trousers' pockets. "Happy Jim" had been converted at the last meeting, and he had since spared no pains to make publicly known his intention of testifying with the rest.

"Yo-all say," he began, "that Happy Jim can't testify, but I'm a-gointer show yo-all that Happy Jim can, too, testify."

He paused and jingled the pennies louder.

"Yo-all say that Happy Jim can't testify; but I'm a-gointer show yo-all that Happy Jim can, too, testify."

He ruminated awhile.

"Yo-all say that Happy Jim can't testify, but I'm a-gointer show yo-all that Happy Jim can, too, testify."

The grin deepened. "Yo-all say that

Happy Jim can't testify; an' I say so, too." And Happy Jim sat down.

Throughout the entire evening the atmosphere of the meeting had seemed to be surcharged with an excited anticipation of something to follow; and in the growing tensity the ludicrous effect of Happy Jim's testimony was lost.

Report had long since published the fact that the society of Come-outers harbored in the midst one possessed of devils; that Job Postlethwaite was the victim, and that the horrid inmates of his person were seven in number. It had been whispered about, but with secrecy, for fear of a crush of unbelievers at the meeting, that the elder had been summoned from Denver for no other purpose than the casting out of these same devils.

In the quiet that followed, Brother Hawkey stepped out into the space in front of the desk, and called loudly upon the name of Job Postlethwaite.

The wretched man stumbled forward, pulling at his neckerchief, as if choked by it. His knees knocked together. The people drew away from him.

The elder raised his voice:

"If there is any back-slidden, or unregenerate among you to-night, let them beware! Let them take heed unto themselves, for when the devils in this man are loosed by praying and laying on of hands, they'll be more than likely to enter into the first vessel of wrath that comes to hand."

The people looked at one another; some of the children began to cry.

Brother Hawkey made a downward gesture with both arms, and all the Come-outers fell on their knees. He laid his hands on the bowed head of the man before him, and, lifting up his voice, prayed with a great noise and a mighty clamor. Lashing himself into a state of ungovernable fury, he ran backward and forward in front of the desk; he kneeled and he shot up again; he doubled his body like a jack-knife, and he unbent it, as if in torment; he writhed, he leaped, he groaned, he yelled, he howled. One would have thought him a more fitting subject for devilish habitation than the pacific Job.

The victim's features were now distorted;

his face was livid; his eyes rolled—some afterward stated that he foamed at the mouth.

The frenzy of the leader affected the people. The children screamed at the tops of their voices; they clutched their mothers' gowns, and hid their little faces from the sight. Cries of "Lord, help!" "Save us, Lord!" "Lord, have mercy!" swept the room. Betty Postlethwaite, her fingers in her ears, bellowed in her corner. One woman shrieked, another fainted; for even a ranch-man's wife may swoon under stress of violent emotion. The audience was now transformed into a swaying, screaming mass, through fright and awe half demented.

A belated ranchman, returning from the city in his empty wagon, heard the noise of the uproar. He burst in at the door, and stood, open-mouthed, appalled at the scene within, and went home to report that them Come-outers was havin' a love-feast or somethin', and had all went mad over it.

"Come out of him, thou unclean spirits!" howled the elder. "I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him!"

From sheer exhaustion he ceased his importunities, and paused to mop his streaming brow.

But a remarkable change was passing over the countenance of the possessed; the fat face broadened into a tearful grin; he stood upright and stretched himself, in awed delight at finding himself whole. "They've went!" blubbered Job. And his friends, pressing around, gathered that he had been able to count them, one by one, for each, on leaving, had bestowed a parting kick.

Job's young wife flung herself on his neck, and there was a great hand-shaking and hullabaloo. But the joy of the people was short-lived.

Brother Hawkey rapped on the desk for attention; he wished to ascertain whether the devils yet lingered in the company; did anyone present feel any inconvenience?

The clamor ceased. One stared at another. Gradually their looks centred on the father of Huldah Moss, a brown and battered countryman. Those near him backed away, so that he was left standing alone in

the middle of the room, twirling his hat in his hands. Beneath the tan he was seen to be very pale. He confessed, huskily, to feeling quite unwell; he had been took suddent, while the brother was praying, with an all-overish pain; he didn't know where it was at; he couldn't place it; he felt kind o' queer and shaky-like, inside of him; he didn't know but he'd got one of them devils; yes, he was dretful afraid he'd got 'em.

Huldah Moss, his daughter, went into violent hysterics.

The people waited to hear no more. A consuming fear possessed them; even now a devil or so might be lurking in their midst, in search of a suitable dwelling-place; their strained nerves gave way, and the meeting ended in a general stampede.

Mr. Crimp jammed on his hat. He laughed jeeringly: "When all these isms have passed away," said he, in his strident voice, "I mean to establish a church here on a firm basis."

But no one heeded the Campbellite preacher's words.

Later, to the relief of all, it was learned

that the fears of Mr. Moss were groundless; he passed several uneasy days and nights, but in an improved state of health he ceased to regard himself as a vessel of wrath, and concluded that he had been mistaken in his symptoms.

X

ROSE ROONEY'S ERROR

In these days there was much talk of Rose Rooney, and Windy Creek was all astir with the speculation of the gossips, voiced as usual by Mrs. Bunt.

"Her 'n' Bertie Brown's awful thick. He's ben hangin' 'round her all summer. He sets off aside of her nights at meetin', an' he sees her home. An' she don't testify in meetin' no more, only to git the chanc't to run Pete down. Folks that don't suspicion nothin' do be awful dumb. Rose, she ain't got no more use for Pete. She don't keers fur home nor nothin'. She's got it bad. It's like pitch-pine stickin' to your fingers of a warm day when Rose gits her head set on a thing. Lord only knows how it's goin' to eend.

"The Come-outers is at the bottom of it, an' her maw's at the bottom of it. They

kep' a-dingin' at her all spring fur havin' a Catholic fur a husband. First, they was after Pete to convert him. An' when they see he hadn't a mind to be converted, they spit out at him, an' they cranked at him. 'T seemed like they couldn't let him be. They kep' a-sendin' papers an' books with slurs on the Catholics fur him to read. An' they've got him that badgered—he riles awful easy with his red hair—that he couldn't be hired to step foot inside the schoolhouse. But he ain't hendered Rose none from 'tendin' ary meetin', an' so the mischeef keeps a-pilin' up on him. They've got Rose all out with herself, till nothin' pleases her. She don't do her work half, an' she's forever jawin' at Pete an' the young-uns. 'T seems like her maw's lost all the sense she ever had. That thur crosscut saw of hern's set all aidge-wise agin, an' goin' constant. It's Pete bein' a Catholic, an' Pete smokin', an' Pete swillin' beer an' coffee, an' Pete this an' Pete that. 'T seems like she's furgot she were the one to ketch Pete fur Rose—an' dretful oneasy she were, too, onc't, lest Pete 'ud give her

the slip. 'T seems like she's shet her eyes to what she's doin'—drivin' Pete an' Rose to a split. 'T 'ud serve her right to have Rose back on her hands agin, an' wuss on her hands with all her young-uns than if she were single.

" The Come-outers an' her maw, they begun it; an' Bertie Brown, he done the rest, hangin' 'round. He's 'tended meetin' reg'lar, an' the Come-outers, they reckoned on another convert, an' they palavered him up good. But he ain't jined, an' he ain't no Come-outer. Religion ain't what's drawed Bertie Brown.

" Onc't in June Pete an' Rose they had a flare-up, an' Rose she left, an' went home to her maw fur three days, an' back-slid fur one whole week. It were tolt around that she were reel reckless like in her talk, an' she says, 'I'm goin' to drink beer, an' swear, an' go to dances; I'm goin' to be as bad as I want to!' But the Mellonses, they iled her up agin; an' first people knowed, she were back to Pete's, an' back to meetin', an' things was goin' on jest like they'd done afore.

"Bertie Brown, he'd have quite a herd of cattle 'round him if he'd kep' all he's handled this yur; he'd have more'n he's got pasture fur. He baches on his claim, but he don't hurt hisself none workin' it. He gives out that he arns his livin' at buyin' an' sellin' cattle. But it's kind o' queer about Bertie—he'll never buy up none o' the young cattle hyurabouts. He's had a whole pile o' calves offered him dirt cheap, but he'd rather go clean off somewhurs fur his bargainds. He'll make trips a-horseback, way to the east and south, frequent; he about lives a-horseback, though he ain't no cow-boy; an' he'll come home in a few days, or a week, mebby, with a head or two of stock, an' often as pore an' scraggly critters as you'd keer to see. He don't seem to keers none fur them bein' pore. He fattens 'em up, an' sells 'em down to the Sprungs, or to Arrowhead, or west of hyur. He's a heap cuter'n to do his tradin' in these parts; thur ain't a man on Windy Creek that 'ud tech one of his calves with a ten-foot pole; ary a rancher but what looks sideways at him. Oh, Bertie's

queered hisself in this country. He's a rustler, all right, Bertie Brown is; an' it'll all come out one o' these days when the sheriff finds his trail."

The Wood cousins, one balmy morning, were surprised in the act of sitting down to breakfast by their widely reputed neighbor, who, with Jimmy, Taddy, Mark, and Ruth Lucille, had come to spend the day.

Rose Rooney was violently red in the face; she was in her most captious mood. With a bundle of carpet-rags in her lap, she sat cross-legged in the middle of the floor, and sorted and sewed; dispossessing herself, for the time being, of the custody of her children, she turned them loose.

Taddy's face was grimy and tear-soaked. Jimmy's dimpled with smiles.

"He's been a-cryin' all the way," said Jimmy. "He cried 'cause I wouldn't wait for 'im. I can't never walk slow, you know, an' Taddy, he jest pokes."

"Is this little boy tired?" Ruth asked, kindly.

The child drew back, and Jimmy thumped his unresponsive brother, saying,

apologetically, "He's awful bashful, 'cept when he's acquainted with folks. That kid don't know nothin'. But he's big enough to fight, an' he c'n fight good, too."

"Are you hungry, Taddy? Do you like crackers?"

Taddy glanced surlily at his questioner.

"Tell her!" his elder brother sternly commanded, with a dictatorial kick.

At the suggestion of something to eat, Taddy's tongue was loosened.

"You dot some cake?"

"No."

"Dot some pie?"

"No."

"Well," sighing, "crackers'll do."

Ruth distributed the crackers among the children.

Mark, with both fists full, climbed to a seat on Ruth's knee, and regarded her with an air of sweet gravity. He was a straight, solid, round-limbed child, with fresh, vivid coloring. Although a year and a half younger than Taddy, he could talk more plainly and was more wide-awake and observant.

"Can you say 'God'? Say it. Say it harder. Let me see your teeth. Have you got all your teeth? Can you bite?"

The cousins wondered if Mark's mother had put him up to calculating their ages by their teeth.

"You've got you a nice shanty," observed Jimmy, critically. "But your door ain't hung straight. Raised a pretty fair crop o' 'taters, didn't you? Put in any cabbages? Ourn didn't head up good; they busted open. Pete said they growed too fast the first of the season. Raise any alfalfa?"

"No."

"We did. Had a pretty good stand on two acres. The rest didn't come up good —they was only 'bout half a stand."

"Do you work in the field, Jimmy?"

"Yes, I pick 'taters till my back aches."

"Are you going to take up land when you're a man?"

"Yes, sir! I'm a-goin' to take up a claim, an' I'm a-goin' to make a good livin' off it, too. You git you a woman, an' a herd o' cattle 'round you, an' you'll sure git ahead!"

Ruth Lucille acquitted herself with dignified baby decorum. Not once all day did she twist her face into even the preliminaries of a squall, but sucked her thumb, cooed, and slept. A round, plump, pink-and-white baby, with silken wisps of hair, and a placid expression in her blue eyes, she was adorable in the little embroidered slip, fashioned for her little namesake by the cunning fingers of Ruth Wood.

"Ruth, you lay that young-un on a piller an' give her something to chaw on," ordered Rose Rooney; adding, "Ma's baby ain't a circumstance to this'n. Ma 'n' pa think theirn is the smartest child in this country, an' they can't seem to git over it, someways. Hallelujah's so dull—she ain't more'n half bright—though course I wouldn't tell ma that. She ain't got a sign of a tooth comin', an' she only three days younger'n mine. Ruth Lucille's got two of hern a'ready. Ruth, you know I named my baby her other name fur Josh Hopkins's wife. Well, that woman ain't give the young-un a thing—she's a awful mean woman. I wouldn't have called my baby

fur her if I'd a'knowed how mean she was goin' to act about it. Now, you've give Ruth Lucille lots of things—you ain't mean like her. I couldn't be so mean, it ain't in me.

"Huldah Moss, she takes on so over this baby. She's awful nice, but she's an odd person—she's twenty-nine years old," said Mrs. Rooney, with a meditative air; and added, "When this baby's a young lady, you girls'll begin to break."

The children grew restless and noisy. They began to explore the cabin. They fingered everything within reach, and kept their hostesses busy rescuing treasures from trespassing fingers. Tomkins, the petted house-cat, had his black satin coat rubbed the wrong way and his feelings outraged until he took refuge on top of the cupboard and held himself aloof, with angry twitchings of his tail, and yellow eyes in a blaze. Rose now and then screamed at the children, but they, being clever enough to detect her secret connivance with their naughtiness in another's house, did their worst without interference.

Ruth gathered the little mob together and quieted them for a few minutes by the recital of "The Three Little Kittens That Lost Their Mittens" and "The Three Bears." Jimmy listened intently, and responded with fragments of wild Indian tales, winding up with the sanguinary statement, "The Injuns killed the people dead, and then they cut them up in chunks."

Taddy and Mark were discovered at the cupboard with a paper sack of apples between them, torn across, and the contents rapidly disappearing.

Hermia's little silver watch, hanging by a guard from its own particular nail, attracted Jimmy's eye, and in forcing open the cover the watch dropped from his hands to the floor.

A sound that struck terror to the hearts of the Wood cousins proved to be Mark tranquilly tearing out leaf after leaf of a treasured illustrated volume of Shakespeare. While Ruth, almost in tears at the sacrilege, rearranged the torn sheets, Rose leaned over to glance at the portrait of the poet. "That man looks like Brother Hawkey,

don't he?" she remarked. And Jimmy, hanging over the pages of pictured kings, generals, knights, and clowns, observed, "Say, them men is dudes, ain't they?"

Rose Rooney sewed vigorously on her carpet-rags; her eye was ever busy, and she threw out random remarks with a caustic tongue.

"Ruth, that train of your'n is good to mop the floor with." Ruth was wearing a pretty morning wrapper. "Don't it make you nervous? It fidgets me jist to hear it swishin' over the floor.

"I seen your pa this mornin'. He was jist gittin' off fur town; he was all cleaned up; I hardly knowed him; he looked like a city dude.

"Ruth, hand me them scissors of your'n —mine cuts so awful dull.

"When 're you girls goin' back to the Springs? When you leave fur town, I'm goin' to come in an' stay all night with you." The Wood cousins exchanged alarmed glances. "I reckon I'll have to pack the children along. Marky, he ain't never seen the city in his life, poor young-

un; an' Taddy ain't been in but twic't. I allus feel so at home at your house. You folks is plain, like me; you ain't tony. Now, I couldn't never think of puttin' up at the Worthington's for a night, nor fur a meal, neither; they're too tony fur me. D'ye know them rich Worthingtons? They're millionaires; they live on Cascade Avenue in a hundred thousand dollar house an' grounds. Them Worthingtons is relations of mine. Mis' Worthington is my cousin."

Upon subsequent inquiry, Ruth Wood and Hermia traced to its source this claim of relationship, never before presented by Rose Rooney. Mrs. Bunt, ever ready, gave the desired information.

"You know old man Wilkins, him that used to stay at Rooney's, an' were their gran'pa and the young-uns' great-gran'pa —he's got married to a old maid that come our hyur a-visitin' from down in Missouri. She's third cousin to Mis' Worthington— she tolt me so herself, when I went to call on her, but I took it with a grain of salt. When I see that woman, I as't myself whur she were raised, she were that slowsy.

She'd got her waist an' skirt on wrong side 'out, to hide the dirt, I reckon, but she hadn't hid much, fur this side looked like it were ready fur the wash a month back. Mebbe she'd put her things on wrong side out by mistake an' then left them so fur good luck. Her stockin's was out at the heel, an' she were skatin' 'round in a pair of the old man's over-shoes—she darsn't lift foot off the ground lest they'd drop off. Her skin were swarty an' her teeth all broke in front an' yaller; she looked like she'd ben dug up. Her hair were stringin' 'round her neck, but she'd ketched up a lot of it onto the crown of her head with a tortoise-shell comb. She said she weren't lookin' fur comp'ny, but I reckoned she were used to goin' about that-a-way."

Query: If Rose Rooney's step-grandmother were Mrs. Worthington's third cousin, what relation might Mrs. Worthington be to Rose Rooney?

"Seen anything of the Bitternses? Dan Bittern's keepin' hisself kind of clos't—nobody's laid eyes on him since his last spree," Rose Rooney went on.

Jimmy, who was listening, spoke up quickly:

"Vine's gone to Mag's, an' Joel's sittin' on the jury."

"I'd set there too if I had a chanc't to make two dollars a day," commented his mother. "Hermia, jest step out an' look fur Marky. If that young-un has took it into his head to run off, I'll lay fur him—I'll lick him within an inch of his life. I won't have no child of mine droppin' into no sich habits. Dianthy Bittern, she use' to be reel stiddy, but she ain't any more, 'n' Stelle is jist gittin' awful wild. They've got everybody down on them; they're talked about awful. The boys is shyin' off some, but they keep a-goin' to dances, with or without comp'ny, jist as it happens. Them two girls, they're goin' crazy, reg'lar boy-crazy."

"Them two girls is gittin' awful wild, no boy won't look at 'em," echoed Jimmy.

Mrs. Rooney continued: "Ain't Stelle the greatest girl to decorate herself out? She was all decorated out with red bows last Literary. Dianthy's an old maid. She

can't never git married now. She might's well quit. Soph Crimp, he's about quit goin' with them two. Some say it's his pa's doin's.

"Ain't Crimp the awfullest man to be stuck on hisself, though? I allus was leary of that man. An' now I've took a despise to him. He don't never preach any more now—he can't git anybody to listen to him. Onc't, 'long in the summer, a lot of the people come to the school-house to meetin', an' Mr. Stamper, he was took sick, an' Mr. Mellon it wasn't his day to preach. An' Crimp, he got up an' said he'd preach if they'd like him to; he'd jist thought of a fine sermon an' he had it down pat. But nobody ast him to, an' they had a testimonial service instid. Crimp, he set it out, but they said he went home awful mad. An' he ain't never got up to preach since. Oh, Crimp's small potatoes, he ain't what he cracked himself up to be.

"Stamper, he's a better preacher than what Crimp is; but he's awful ignorant—he can't hold a candle to Mr. Mellon. He's so plaguey noisy, too—they can't a blessed

baby git to sleep with him a-bellerin' in the pulpit; he's got every young-un wide-awake an' fussin' with his preachin' an' prayin'. I do like a preacher that can pray quiet an' peaceable like Mr. Mellon.

"They can't nobody come up to the Mellonses. Mis' Mellon, she's a perfect lady—she's real stylish an' young-lookin' to be the mother of two young ladies. Some call her stuck-up; but she ain't, she's jist as common as she can be. She'll run in on you an' eat a meal with you any time, an' she'll carry you off to eat with her. Mr. Mellon, he's common, too. He's well educated; he can preach most as good as Brother Hawkey can. Them Mellonses is the best friends I've got. They ain't a thing they wouldn't do fur me—they set sich store by me. Mr. Mellon, he calls me his right-hand man at testimonials."

"How long have you been a Come-outer?" inquired Hermia Wood.

Mrs. Rooney laughed aloud.

"Come-outer! Well, that gits me. We don't never call ourselves that name—it's a slur on us, you know. That's what people

call us when they want to badger us. We're the Evening Lights. You mustn't mind my laughin' at you, Hermia. I knowed you didn't mean it fur a slur, but it tickled me when you called me a Come-outer." Hermia apologized for her very natural mistake.

His mother's example stimulated Jimmy to gossip, and he announced to the company in general that he seen Bertie Brown last night.

Rose Rooney looked up quickly; a conscious blush stained her cheeks. "Where'd you see him?"

"Over to Bunt's. Lon Bunt, he says Bertie Brown's a rustler!"

Rose made a dive at him, but her eldest born was too quick for her, and ran laughing out at the door. Her face was deeply dyed with crimson. "That's the orneriest youngster I ever raised!" she blazed. "But I can't be expected to have decent children with a wild-cat for a husband!"

She rambled on, heaping abuse upon the absent partner of her lot; it was remarked that she had nothing to say of Bertie Brown, nor did she once mention his name.

"The men in this State is so ornery, an' I've got the orneriest man of all. Pete, when he comes home nights from work, he sets around an' smokes till I tell him if I was a ham of meat I'd be pretty well smoked. Many's the wiggin' I've give him for it, but he keeps right on. He's allus a-growlin' at me to pick potatoes. He says to me yisterday mornin', 'There's your sister out on the hill pickin' potatoes; why can't you do like her?' he says. 'Why,' I says to him, 'Betty ain't got no children an' I have, blame it!' I could 'a' slapped him! I do every bit of the milkin' an' swillin' the pigs, honest I do; an' I never git no help from him. Men is so mean. I was tellin' ma 'n' pa about it yisterday when I was over home, an' they said they jist wouldn't do it if they was me; they said they wouldn't be put upon. I don't believe your pa ever ast your ma to work out in the fields; if he done sich a thing onc't I reckon Mis' Wood would be so surprised at him he wouldn't be likely to do it agin. There's Betty now, a-pickin' potatoes for Job, an' she so sick she can't hardly stand

up—jist gittin' over bein' delirious an' talkin' out of her head. I'd like to see the color of his hair that could make me do it. But Betty's young yit; she's got lots to learn. Betty's kind of odd; she hasn't been away from home enough to know how to act; an' she takes after pa, too; he's kind of odd. Lord, when I was her age! You see when she 'n' Job married she was jist a child; she ain't learnt much yit, neither; she's jist as innocent; she's jist a angel; she don't know nothin' about the world. I've seen that girl, when Job spoke short to her, look like she was ready to cry. Her eyes they fill right up with tears jist at nothin'. Betty was raised tender-hearted. Nobody never spoke cross to her at home, 'cept perhaps jist onc't in a while, when something went wrong. Pa, he was allus so good to her, too. She was the pick of the family. Oh, I tell you, girls, we git mighty different treatment when we leave home. Home ain't nothin' to bein' married. You git more hard knocks from the ones that's promised to love an' cherish you than a little bit. I've see the time when I was tender-hearted, like

Betty; but I've had to git all over that; I've learnt to be as hard as a rock,"—her blue eyes full of fire.

"I hate this pesky country where you can't raise nothin' but potatoes! There ain't nothin' out here but wind an' dust an' hard work. It seems like the wind is goin' to dry us all up an' blow us away. I declare to goodness, I wish't would. I wish something would happen. I want to clear out from Windy Crick; I want to go to live in the Springs or in Pueblo. If I had the right kind of a man," said Rose, choking over her wrongs, "a man that had some sand, I would be livin' in the city, you bet!

"Ruth, wouldn't you rather have Curly O'Coole than lots of the fellows out here? Betty could have had him. Betty could have had almost any fellow out here instid of that old lummix that she did marry. You heard about Job havin' seven devils cast out of him? Well, I reckon he's got seven others left. Ma, she says now she thinks it's almost a sin to marry off your girls so young, she ain't never goin' to do it any more. She's goin' to let Lympy an' Hallelujah have their pick.

"Folks thinks it's awful queer you Wood girls don't never git married; but I think you're jist about right; you're a heap better off single," said Rose Rooney, with her narrow gaze.

A pair of shoes standing in an out-of-the-way corner caught Mrs. Rooney's eye. She instantly tried them on, and wore them all the afternoon, triumphant over having at last discovered the size of Hermia's shoe.

With the summons to dinner, Rose Rooney's outspoken discontent was checked for a time. The children had discovered a pair of dumb-bells, and were rolling them about with a fearful clatter; the general clamor was rivalled by a display of table-manners exceeding anything previously witnessed by the Wood cousins in their experience of Rose Rooney and her family.

Taddy looked across the dinner-table with a sigh of approval, and spoke his honest convictions when he said: "Ruth an' Hermia's all right! they's daisies!"

Rose's roving eye made a critical survey of the dinner-table. She informed her

hostesses that she did not like warm apple-sauce; she could not eat it unless it was cold. She tasted her tea and made a wry face.

"What kind of tea is this, Ruth?"

"Young Hyson."

Mrs. Rooney stirred viciously. "Well, I don't like it a bit; it's awful bitter."

Jimmy swallowed a trial teaspoonful. "Gosh!" said he, "this tea's bitter."

"Ain't you 'shamed to talk that way at the table?" cried his mother, while she chuckled at his smartness.

"Ruth, give them young-uns some milk to drink; I don't never let my children drink strong tea."

"Did your ma make this butter?" demanded Mrs. Rooney, spreading her bread thickly. "It tastes awful funny. It tastes like the churn hadn't been scalded out. You have to be awful pettic'ler when you make butter, you know."

Ruth and Hermia simultaneously registered a silent vow never, never, never again to break bread under Rose Rooney's roof.

Their guest pushed back her dish of cottage-cheese.

"Why, Hermia, this smear-case is so sloppy! You ain't squeezed half the whey out. I can't never eat smear-case unless it's real dry.

"Jake an' Cicely Atwood, they're awful poor, they about live on smear-case. They don't have half enough to eat. Onc't I was over there, an' Cicely, she set Jake down to the table to smear-case an' almost nothin'. He set there over fifteen minutes mincin' over a little water gravy."

"I could eat a thousand pieces of cake," said Jimmy, helping himself liberally.

"What are them little sticks fur?" pointing with his finger to some tooth-picks. When Ruth had enlightened him, he remarked: "I'd like to have some of them tooth-picks. I'd take them home an' pick till I died."

Rose's ill-humor infected the children.

"That's my knife you're eatin' with," said Jimmy, and forthwith snatched it from his brother.

"You div that knife here!" whined Taddy.

"It's mine, an' I'm a-goin' ter eat with it."

Their mother spoke sharply from across the table:

"You give that knife back! Ain't you 'shamed to act like that in comp'ny?"

"That's jest like a woman to talk that way!" The baby voice vibrated with scorn.

Mrs. Rooney half rose. "Jimmy Rooney, do you want me to come there to you?"

In dreadful anger the boy thrust the knife to his brother. "Dog-gone you!" he said, his tone more than his words betraying his passion.

Rose Rooney ate heartily of every dish. She pushed back her chair, finally, and swept the crumbs from her lap to the floor.

"Say, did you hear that Jake an' Cicely Atwood has both back-slid from the United Brethrens? Jake swears an' they both goes to dances.

"Did you ever read that book, 'From the Ball-room to Hell'? Mis' Mellon, she lent it to me. It's jist splendid. It's got a picture of the Old Harry in it."

Rose's speech was arrested by a commo-

tion at the door. It was Cicely Atwood, who had run across the road for a neighborly call with her baby in her arms and two shepherd dogs at her heels. The bright smile on her face faded as her placid gaze came into sharp contact with Rose Rooney in a sea of carpet-rags. They were not on speaking terms. Cicely sat stiffly on the edge of a chair, refusing all persuasion to lay aside her sun-bonnet. Mrs. Rooney silently stitched, with tightly closed lips and flashing eyes.

Cicely Atwood's observing faculties were not behind the ordinary country girl's, but a morning spent at her mother's had rendered her unconscious of Mrs. Rooney's movements, and she had blundered in on her enemy unawares.

Since her marriage Cicely Atwood had fulfilled the early predictions of Rose Rooney. She was "frowsy headed," her dress was untidy and gaping and buttonless; pins were used freely in her toilet. Her infant son, a thin, sallow child, with a pale-blue eye and senile leer, was not over-clean, and contrasted but poorly with Mrs. Rooney's

plump, fresh-colored children. He was dressed in a hideous little garment of snuff-colored outing-flannel.

Hermia drew her embarrassed neighbor into talking of her baby, and remarked that he looked pale.

The mother glanced thoughtfully at her offspring. "That dress is kind o' delicate, an' I reckon that's why he looks so white," she said, in her flat, nasal tones. "He's light complected, anyway, like his paw. He's fussin' with his teeth now; they eetch so. He's lookin' lots pearter than what he done awhiles back. He were pulin' away like, an' maw, she said he were kind o' wormy. I were dretful sceert about him. A child has to be 'lowanced by its mother; if it ain't put on a di-at, it's li'ble to hurt itself.

"I were home a-visitin' with Shaky this mornin', an' when we went it were milkin' yit, it were that yurly. I do enjoy goin' home; I like to milk with paw, it 'minds me of when I were a girl at home.

"Did you ever take notice of the sight" (pupils) "of Shaky's eyes, how large they

is? Sometimes I'm afeared they're too large to be healthy. I don't want Shaky to have nothin' the matter of his eyes. Shaky's forehead is so large. I want to have his head examined by one of theesyur friendologists."

Rose Rooney sniffed audibly.

"I an' Jake aim to give Shaky a college education."

"Why do you call him Shaky?" asked Hermia.

"Why, we call him fur a man named Shakespeare. The people that Jake used to be coachman to in the Springs was allus talkin' about a man named Shakespeare that were dretful smart, an' Jake, he hearn so much about the man that he had to call our little one fur him.

"I an' Jake lay off to build a addition to our house this fall."

Rose Rooney laughed derisively.

Cicely Atwood, laboriously ignoring her enemy, continued: "Jake lays off to haul the lumber from the Divide an' put up a lean-to, an' a portecule for cucumber vines, next Spring.

"Have you girls hearn about the people on the Divide? Jake he were haulin' fuel; he gits cedar along the aidge of the Divide, north-like of hyur, an' some campers-out tolt him; that's the way he come to hyur of it. All the people on the Divide is lookin' fur the world to come to an eend. It was in the papers that the Red Sea had been blowed out by a cyclone, an' you know it says in the Bible, when the Red Sea shall be dried up, then the world shall come to an eend. The preachers is preachin', an' they've got the people all worked up like over it.

"Well, I must be goin'," said Cicely, edging off her chair. "Have you-uns got a piece of cloth to trim a hat with? Any kind of cloth'll do, if it's worsted. I'm a-goin' to cover the frame of my old hat fur winter; it's all wore out. That piece of striped goods will do. Thanky."

"World comin' to an end nothin'," cried Rosė Rooney, bursting from the strain of her difficult silence, as Cicely's receding form left the door. "The people that lives over on the Divide is awful easy took in—

no cyclone is goin' to be big enough to blow out a whole sea!

"There's a woman that's awful slack," she went on, loudly. "What'd I tell you girls about Cicely Atwood's housekeepin' when she come to git married? You've only got to peek in her house onc't to jedge of her; she's a awful poor housekeeper. How Jake Atwood puts up with her is more than I can see. She never ast me into her house; I wouldn't go if she did, but I peeked in onc't when she was out. My land! The floor all over grease-spots, an' the bed not made, an' it afternoon, an' the table a heap of dirty dishes an' vittles, an' that baby of hern settin' in the middle of the floor, its face an' hair an' clo'es as black as ink. I went right over an' told ma about it, an' Em, an' Mort Post's wife. Cicely, she acts like she done somethin' smart to git married. I never see a woman to be so puffed up about gittin' married in all my borned days. What she c'n see to be proud over in that there soft-soapy Jake of hern I can't see. An' that young-un of theirn is bound for the Pen, 'stid of college. Did ye

ever see the Evil Eye plainer in a child? When that youngun smiles it makes a cold shiver creep up 'n' down my backbone to see him.

"It's jist wonderful," said the critic, patronizingly, "how the folks has improved out here on Windy Creek. Now, look at them Bunts; when they first come to this country they was awful ignorant, but now they do know a little. The boys is turnin' out real stiddy. I ain't nothin' agin the men-folks, nor Polly. But I'm leary of old lady Bunt, an' Cicely, with the airs she gives herself."

The rampant tongue ran on and on. The gentle hostesses, long since wearied of their visitor, saw no other way to rid themselves of her than by a freezing process, and about the middle of the afternoon Rose Rooney gathered up her brood and went home, the picture of discontent.

Often in the morning, when Pete was at work beyond the crest of the hill, a horseman lingered beside his cabin, lounging with slackened rein, and one leg thrown over the horn of the saddle, while within

the fence Rose dawdled, arms bared to the elbow, cheeks burned to a rich red; the two lost in a maze of empty, endless talk.

And often in the evening the idle talk renewed itself at the kitchen door, when the young ranchman stopped for a drink of water, supplied him in a brimming tin cup from Rose's hand. The younger children hung about, open-mouthed; but Jimmy, sharp of eye and ear, treasured much for absent Daddy's sake, and peace fled away from the home when Pete came in to find the stove cold, and the children fretting and Rose dreaming at a window.

And often of a Sabbath night the two walked home from meeting together. They loitered on their way; now in whispered tones they talked, though the prairie road was lonely. There was a witchery in the strong moonlight, in the odorous night-air. The frogs' hoarse cadence seemed calling them to stay; a night-bird, whizzing past, brushed their mingled hair with its wing; the hour, the place, the stolen caress, dulled sense of duty, blotted out distinction betwixt right and wrong.

Rose Rooney's Error

From her seat in the bedroom, one evening, Rose, crooning to her infant, could see her husband, stiff and torpid from a long day's work, in a chill east wind, nodding over the fire. Between her clenched teeth she sang; and the smouldering embers of her discontent burst into flames of loathing for the rough, red laborer whom her mother had imposed upon her while she was yet a child, too young to choose for herself. She felt that she hated this man, whom Bertie Brown had called a "blooming chump."

Rose Rooney tucked the baby in her little crib, scolded and hustled the older children, and came into the kitchen, with hostility in her eye. She flourished a pamphlet in his face.

"Look at this, now! Here's a book Mis' Mellon give me to read. Look at it, can't you, 'stid of settin' there blinkin'! I never see sech a dumb-head to set around an' sleep nights. It's a book wrote about your tony Catholics, an' it's a dead give-a-way on them; it tells all about how they cheat folks out of their rights, an' how they take the bread out of poor folks's mouths like us, to

build their fine churches with. Jest you read that now, an' drop your old Catholics!"

Pete gave a grunt and pushed the book aside. It fell to the floor. "Catholicism Exposed" was printed in glaring letters on the cover.

Rose stopped to pick up the book. Her impish mood possessed her to spell out to the unwilling ears of her husband, phrase after phrase of libelous thrusts at his religion. At the time of her marriage Rose had not known one letter from another. In picking up "a little larning" since, it had proved "a dangerous thing."

She had no conception of being herself a trial to him; she did not see the cloud on his averted face, else she might have refrained from teasing his mood. As she stumbled on over the long words, the tawdry argument, the denunciations, Pete's patience left him, the tempest of his wrath gathered and broke, and he swept the book from his wife's grasp into the fire.

Rose's face blazed—in a flash the flat of her hand dealt a furious blow across her husband's cheek. She had roused his fury;

he seized her by the wrists and forced her into a chair; shook her; and in deep tones of wrath bade her let him and his religion alone in the future, and to keep her Come-outers to herself—there would be the mischief to pay if them or their books ever found their way into his house again. Then he left the room, banging the door behind him.

The angry woman screamed after her husband until she was hoarse, and followed up her outburst of foul language with wild, hysterical sobbing that lasted half the night. The children crept quietly out of her way, and presently put themselves to bed.

The next Sunday, in meeting, his wife's testimonials did serious damage to Pete's already defamed character; his reputation as a wife-beater was established, and all the Come-outers gave freely of sympathy and advice to the unfortunate consort of a desperately hardened villain.

In the school-yard, after meeting, Mrs. Bunt was overheard by a pair of sharp ears belonging to Olympia Flieger, freeing her mind to a knot of women, as follows:

"Pete, he over-doos it; he ain't got no call to put up with her didos the way he do; he'd ought to put a stop to her runnin' with them Come-outers, an' gittin' up in meetin' an' callin' him names. She ain't a decent woman to live with, Rose ain't, an' she knows it. She runs down everybody alike that doesn't please her, same as she runs Pete down. Her young-uns is gittin' too smart fur her, hyur lately, an' thur agoin' to give her clean away one of these days. Know why she drives Jimmy out to chop wood when she has comp'ny? She's afeard he'll let out some of the things she's been a-sayin' about them, an' shame her, Rose is."

The drift of these remarks, with variations, was promptly carried to headquarters. Rose Rooney was furious. When on the point of rushing at once to have it out with Mrs. Bunt, she changed her mind and laboriously wrote her neighbor a scathing note; this she despatched by Jimmy, with instructions to watch the effect; and whipped the children all around to relieve her excitement.

While the little messenger impishly lingered, Mrs. Bunt, with Polly hanging over her shoulder, read the note; her indignation rose at every line. And Jimmy's mother, after putting him to the test of a rigid cross-examination, rested satisfied that the phrases: "You said I wasn't a decent woman," and "By the Lord, I'll have you pulled for it," were more cuttingly efficient written than if screamed in her enemy's ear.

As Pete came home from the field the Wednesday following, and his children ran to meet him, he caught sight of a tall figure in sombrero and leathern breeches, dodging off among the out-buildings. It was the manner of his going that roused into action the latent fury long nurtured in the injured husband's breast, and he flung the children from him, in passing snatched a cow-hide from its nail on the shed-door, at the foot of the slope behind the log-stable stopped his enemy, and grappled with him. The loud singing of Rose Rooney in the house above them sounded in their ears.

Taken by surprise, the young ranchman struck out with his fists; he had no time to

draw his revolver, but, though tall and athletic and inured to the rough life of the plains, he was shortly overcome, pinned to the earth, impotent in an iron grip, and the weapon fell like a flail over face, head, and shoulders, with an almost murderous fury.

Jimmy stood quiet on the crest of the hill, aghast, but sure that daddy was in the right. But the younger boy ran, screaming, to the house, stumbling and falling, yet never varying the pitch of his scream, and Rose, drawn by his noise, came to the kitchen door, dish-towel in hand.

Strange, significant sounds, thuds and muffled cries struck her keen ear, and at once cleared her perception. She darted down the hill in flying leaps, and, tiger-like, flung herself on Pete's avenging arm. Her husband cast aside his bloody whip, spurned the writhing figure on the ground, and bade him begone. Dusty, bleeding, the boy rose and fell; rose and fell again; he cast upon Pete a look of unquenchable defiance and limped away, cursing them both, under his breath.

Rose Rooney stood with breast heaving

and nostrils dilated as if from hard running; her color was livid, her lips purple; the blue blaze of her eyes was like the play of lightning over her face; a moment she stood so, without speech or tears, then turned and fled up the hill.

When Pete went into the house, a little later, the baby's crib was empty, Mark's house of blocks deserted; Rose was gone. Taddy, crying softly on the door-step, could only tell him that Rose had went off with Marky and the baby; she tooked them in the little wagon. Pete looked out through the gathering dusk; far down the road he could see the woman's figure, trailing after her the little wagon; her course lay in the direction of her mother's house.

Two little figures, hand in hand, next morning, startled Mrs. Bunt, shaking the breakfast-cloth at the back door. They were Jimmy and Taddy.

"Well, Rose has left again," said Jimmy, smiling blandly.

Mrs. Bunt thrust her head in at the door. "Polly, you come right out hyur! Rose Rooney has gone and left agin! You poor

little toads, whatever will you do without your maw?"

"Oh, we're all right," rejoined Jimmy, swelling with the importance of his position. "Pete an' us has lots of fun. I come to borry some soda. Pete's goin' to make biscuit."

Mrs. Bunt gazed down at the little boys, with her arms akimbo. "Ain't you 'shamed to talk about your maw that-a-way?"

"No. We don't like her, no-way. We don't want her back."

"Taddy, ain't you sorry your maw's gone off an' left you?"

"No," said Taddy, pugnaciously. "Me don't like Wose; me likes Pete."

Mrs. Bunt and her daughter drew from the children a disconnected and somewhat incoherent account of the events of the day before, thirsting especially after the details of the battle.

"Polly," said Mrs. Bunt, tying on her bonnet, "you give them children their sody an' send them home; thur paw'll be after them. An' 'tend to the work an' feed the chickens. I must go right over an' tell

Cic'ly the noos, an' mebbe I'll stop to the Wood girls' if thur up."

While her children were spreading abroad the fame of her flight, Rose Rooney had already left the shelter of her mother's home, and was striding across the prairie, in bold defiance of Mother Grundy. She crossed one field, and then another. Mr. Bunt passed along the road, hauling a load of potatoes to the city; she saw him pull up his slow-stepping horses to take a look at her. "Rubber-neck!" said she, angrily. She crawled under the wire fences and filled her shoes with sand and her stockings with needle-grass barbs; but she forged ahead, preferring the prairie to the public road. Driven on by headlong passion and imperious will, she hurried up the path to Bertie Brown's shack. She tried the latch; it was fast. She shook the door until the casement rattled; she peered in at the window; the room was empty. She sought him in the stackyard; she gazed up and down the cornfield. Back at the doorstep, with a loud sob, she shook again the resisting latch. His pet cat rubbed against her

ankles, purring loudly. She sat down and waited, long and patiently; sometimes crying, sometimes musing, often springing up to gaze, with shaded eyes, out across the prairie.

While Rose waited on the step, a procession was wending its way into the Springs; the sheriff, with a young fellow in custody, and a posse of officers on horse-back; a warrant in his possession for the arrest of one Bertie Brown, charged with the crime of cattle-stealing.

Livid marks of last night's beating disfigured the prisoner's face. His smart, cow-boy toggery was rent and dusty from a recent struggle. But changed for the worse as was his outward appearance, sadder still were the signs of his moral degradation, the slouch of the figure, the hanging head, the lowering air. A trial and a term in the penitentiary awaited him, and Bertie Brown was seen on Windy Creek no more. As one after another, the owners came to reclaim their cattle, his herd was scattered, and his abandoned claim lay idle.

A violent squabble with her mother, oc-

casioned by a broad hint that herself and her children were found burdensome, decided Rose Rooney to return home. She came as she had gone, hauling her two young children in their little wagon.

The husband showed in his reception of his erring wife a tact and forbearance surpassed by few in his position. His kindness was negative; for long ago caresses and love-words had ceased between them. But he met the baffled and rebellious woman as if she had merely been away on a visit; he spoke in a matter-of-fact way of the speckled heifer falling off in her milk, and of Taddy's needing a pair of shoes for the colder weather. He had nothing to say of her past conduct, nor did he throw up to her the name of the man who had tampered with his poor home, and so nearly destroyed it.

Childish though it was, her heart had been capable of a woman's grief; touched but once, it must now turn back upon itself. She had learned to regard her husband with loathing; she must unlearn that notion of him; it was hard for eyes that had once

been opened to criticism, to forget what they had seemed to see. She was very ignorant. She did not know enough to make teachers of her mistakes. As for looking to her religion to console her, let him who will, try the hardening effect of falling from grace after a sojourn on the heights of sanctification; and experience the inevitable result of shame and disgust at having been duped. The trials of the past few months had had anything but a salutary effect on Rose Rooney's tempestuous nature; she was the worse rather than the better for her sufferings; she took up her old life again, but took it hard.

XI

DIANTHA

One of the gayest and best attended dances in the country-side came off at Dan Bittern's on the Tuesday night following the great Come-outer meeting. The young people appeared in full force, and a number of Free Methodist and United Brethren backsliders, incited by a fiddle, slid back to earth on an unplaned floor. Diantha seemed the most blithesome in the company; her face glowed with color, her tripping feet were never still.

From the circle of her old flames Raleigh Post had long ago withdrawn to be absorbed by a little dumpy girl in a short frock, buttoned in the back; Hal Hopper hung open-mouthed upon Estelle's every look and laugh; but still faithful, with his gaze of honest admiration, Phil Schuyler

hovered near, though too slow, too cautious to be counted as a lover.

Of partners she had plenty, for as it is with love or money, so with dancing: partners beget partners. But Diantha's heart was sinking. Not once since his brief greeting at the door had Soph Crimp come near her.

As each time the music started up and set her heart to beating, she saw him approach some other girl with his set phrase, "Will you assist me in this dance?" And oftenest it was the girl from Arrowhead, the new girl who had such a flip way of batting her eyes at the boys.

She wasn't a bit pretty—what could he see in her? Fear spurred Diantha's flagging spirits—fear lest Soph's public neglect of her should be remarked.

Her natural coquetry, an unconscious spirit often, but ever alive in her, was tonight a means of defence, and the melting glances from her beautiful eyes, half bewitching her partners, were but a mask for her uneasy thoughts strayed off to another.

She was practising the deception learned

early by every woman; and as she danced she saw but one figure, tall, square-shouldered, the most active in the room. She noted how his blue tie matched his eyes in color; it was her gift to him; and she remembered how her hands had shaken when she tied it for him, the first night of his wearing it, and how he had smiled and kissed her finger-tips.

There was one among the boys to-night, a silly fellow, whose breath smelt strong of spirits; and in avoiding him Diantha found less time for brooding thoughts.

Dick Mace, commonly known as Penitentiary Dick, her father designed for a son-in-law. With the obtuse insistence of a man of whiskey-drenched wits, he had ordered her attention to Dick, and Diantha, suffering in advance the penalty of her father's displeasure, caught now and again Dan's shifting eye, saw him drinking not so freely as usual, and knew that she was under surveillance.

If Soph would only treat her as he used to, there would be no need to keep out of Dick's way, for then Dick would not be

troubling her. Did he never mean to ask her?

Her partner saw her to a seat on the end of a bench already crowded by two hilarious couples, and walked away. The music changed to a waltz tune, "After the Ball."

When a dance with Soph seemed to have reached the unattainable, Mr. Crimp's son came carelessly up, and in a masterful way claimed her for the waltz. She who had been so spirited with other lovers, took the offered arm with meekness, her heart beating gladly. For a few brief moments she floated around and around the room on Soph's strong, supporting arm, her hand clasped in his, his glance upon her; she was radiantly happy; at that moment of exaltation minding the spying, commenting crowd no more than a swarm of flies, caring naught for scrutiny or whispered slur.

"Havin' a good time to-night, Di?"

"Oh, fine!"

The piteous lie was scarcely spoken when the music ceased and he led her to a seat and left her, to come near her no more that night.

At supper Soph and Miss Bliss, the black-eyed little school-teacher from Arrowhead, shared the same plate and coffee cup; she took no pains to hide her glee; his mirth was offensively loud and boisterous, and Diantha, covertly listening, burned with anger and grief. At Phil Schuyler's remarks she laughed at random; she ate nothing; her coffee-cup she sent twice to be refilled.

A quadrille was forming; in the one of the sets four were impatiently "ragging;" in the other, three; the caller-off shouted for another good-looking couple. Young Schuyler, with Diantha on his arm, stepped into the vacant place, but was promptly shoved aside by the missing couple. Soph Crimp and Miss Bliss had lingered out of doors for a whiff of air, so they said, and Soph added insult to injury by the smiling taunt: "Did you ever get left?" and everybody laughed.

Someone whispered that the old bachelor—the cattleman was twenty-seven—was trying to cut Soph out; and someone else averred that Diantha was using the old

bachelor to get Soph back. It was the Valley of Humiliation, and Diantha trod it with dancing feet and weighted heart.

The September night was one of the most peaceful of the month. Overhead shone the quiet stars. Around lay the hills in calm repose. A dark, low-lying shadow along the western horizon gave a suggestion of the mountain-range. The horses champed their hay over the wagon-beds and one of them pawed the earth. Without, all was tranquillity; within, unhealthy emotion ran all the gamut of triumph, pride, pique, jealousy, and heartache.

About five o'clock in the morning the dancers wearied of the floor and straggled home. Dick Mace alone lingered after the rest. Though maudlin from the effects of the bad whiskey he had been tossing down all night, he heard sounds that sobered him, and sent him home in perplexed meditation, revolving in his dull mind some few startled thoughts; he heard Dan Bittern's growl as of a wild beast penned; he heard him curse his child, and he slunk away at the cruel sound of the blows that followed. . . .

The sun was high overhead when Dan lay out in the stable, sleeping drunkenly, and Diantha sat alone over her untasted breakfast, the cold remains of last night's feast. She sat unmoved in the midst of appalling disorder—beds and bedding heaped up in the yard, and stove-pipes knocking about the door, the floor begrimed from the pounding of many feet.

She leaned her pale head on her hand, not thinking, but in a sort of apathy, tracing and retracing by daylight's cold reality the occurrences of the night before.

During the past year a furor of dances had seized the community, and of the fifty given, the Bittern sisters had missed not one. In the people's regard for them there had been a subtle, slow-working change; they were more lightly treated; there was a falling off in the attentions of the young men; they were spoken of as "flirty" and "flip"; even in Mrs. Bunt, who had heretofore taken a motherly interest in them, there was a certain hardness of manner.

"Them ain't the stiddy-hearted girls I took them fur," Mrs. Bunt had said of them.

"They can't someways settle down and be sensible. They've made thurselves dirt cheap, bein' allus on the go. Let them girls stay at home stiddier, an' thur pa, he'd be stiddier.

"Thur's faults on both sides, now that's what I do say. Them girls, they ain't called on to stay claired out from home like they doos, goin' to every dance an' prayer-meetin' in the country. I can't someways put up with Dianthy like I've allus done afore.

"I've been a mother to that girl, but I ain't aimin' to stew over her no more. Long in the spring, it were jest at school closin', Dianthy she come a-cryin' to me; it were the first time she'd ever owned up to her pa's didos; she said her pa had drove her out of the house and she were 'feared of him; she hadn't nowhurs to go; an' she begged to be let stay with I an' pa. She said she'd be willin' to work in the field to arn her keep if I an' pa'd take her in. I spoke up reel sharp an' ast her what her two married sisters were fur, an' whur they were at that she couldn't go to them? An' I up an' ast her why she hadn't looked out

fur herself an' got her a home when she had the pick of decent fellers. I told her she'd better go along back to her pa; most likely he didn't carry on as bad as some folks said he done, an' she could hitch along with him someways if she'd try. Oh, I were reel sharp with her. I reckoned she needed stirrin' up like, an' I done it fur her own good. I told her she'd thank me fur it some day. It riled me to think of I an' pa takin' Dianthy in that had kin of her own to look after her. We're awful crowded to our house, an' we ain't got no room to spare fur no outsider; an' I someways couldn't abide the idee of bringin' a flip girl like Dianthy into the house with my boys. Dianthy 'n Stelle, thur kind o' oneasy comp'ny fur young boys. I don't someways feel right when my boys is off with them."

If Mrs. Bunt and other respectable middle-aged women of her stamp whose own faulty youth lies forgotten in the background, could for an instant witness the sullymg of a girl's pure name by the innuendo so lightly thrown out, could for an instant behold the incalculable damage

wrought by that meddlesome member, the tongue, their own would cease to wag, nor would they, for a time at least, repeat the offence.

Diantha puzzled in vain over the change. She grieved at the estrangement of Mrs. Bunt. Her sad thoughts had travelled this ground many times, yet she had learnt nothing. There was no one to tell her that by her very efforts to regain her social standing she was cheapening herself.

She imputed her loss of popularity to oncoming age. In a pitiful attempt to appear juvenile, she cut off her hair and shortened her skirts; and Estelle followed suit. As a result of their social decline, both Diantha and Estelle went out more indefatigably than ever. The summer had been a slow torture to Diantha. That Dick Mace, backed by her father, continually annoyed and beset her, was the least of her griefs. She had long harbored a dread that Soph was wearying of her. Long since she had felt his preference—his feeling for her had never been a passion—cooling, and of late he seemed to be striving to unloose the

tendrils of her affection that had taken such clinging hold on his cold organism, that he might throw them ruthlessly to the winds.

Diantha did not take this in; she felt only a vague fear that Soph was going back on her. . . .

A step sounded at the door. Diantha started, nervously. Was it Soph, come, too? But no. It was Dick Mace who stepped in over the stove-pipes and stood twisting his hat in his hands, regarding her with a mixture of embarrassment and pity in his dull gaze, that perplexed her.

"I come to tell you good-by, Diantha. I'm goin' to my claim out to Brierly. . . . I ain't a-goin' to plague you no more."

At the Sunday meeting fresh reports of Dan Bittern's cruelty were circulated.

Diantha sat through the sermon looking like a wraith; when for a day her color left her, its flight discovered the contour of thin cheek and hollow eye. Her wan appearance struck even the careless Crimp, who indulged one or two good stares and scarcely waited for the girl to leave the school-

room door before remarking jocosely to his son:

"Soph, you'd ought to marry that girl; she's dyin' fur love of you."

Several of the neighbors standing near caught the remark and lingered for the reply.

"Yes, I'll be likely to marry a girl I don't care to kiss. Say, there, Lon, goin' to the dance at Milligan's?"

"Betchoo I'll be thur to swing the girls," was the response.

The outcome of the father's lightly given advice was a visit paid by the son to the Bittern homestead. Soph meant at once, and finally, to dispossess Diantha of any cherished idea that she had a hold upon him. He was annoyed that she should openly show herself wounded at any act of his. Once reminded that she had no part in his career, she would alter her manner, and the neighbors, comprehending his position, would respect his man's liberty.

He set off a little before sunset, in his father's cart; meaning, when he had thrown the light of his logic upon her future path

and his own, and shown the two lying quite distinct, to take the sisters to the evening meeting, for in that primitive country it is possible for one seat to hold three, or even four.

Diantha was not visible, so he sat down beside Estelle on the doorstep, and put his arm around her. She resented his familiarity by slapping his hands, laughing in her hysterical manner. They spoke of the dance.

"What made you do that last waltz so awkward, Stelle?"

"I didn't."

"You did, too."

"Well, if I did 'twas all along o' you. You didn't look where you was leadin' me, an' if I fell over Mr. Fairley, I 'low 'twas your look-out!"

"Ha, ha! You did look so funny, buttin' into Claude Fairley! Where's Di?"

Estelle jerked her head toward the darkening room.

"Come out here an' speak to a fellow!" said Soph, with a raised voice and a wink aside.

There was no reply; Estelle remarked, as she chewed a strand of gypsy hair, "She's been awful glum since our dance."

"Say, there, Di, ain't mad at me 'cause I didn't dance with you all the evening, are you?"

Still no answer, but a slight movement betrayed the listener within.

"Gosh!" said the sprightly Soph, "there's so many of you girls out here a fellow can't begin to dance with you all. You haven't no call to go and get mad about it."

Both young people laughed.

Their nonsense was presently interrupted by Diantha's coming out of her obscurity and standing in the doorway. Her face looked pale, but there was an eager light in her eyes.

"I reckon I'll bring Dolly up out of the pasture. Go with me, Soph?"

"With the greatest of pleasure," responded the youth, lounging off the step. The two walked down the path, the halter hanging from the girl's arm.

Estelle watched them with a face of un-

concern; then went into the house to dress for meeting, singing, as she combed her hair:

"'Tis religion that can give
Sweetest pleasure while we live."

Diantha walked by the side of her idol, neither knowing nor caring that he was fashioned of the commonest clay. She had an acute consciousness of the athletic figure sauntering by her side, with self-sufficient air. She ventured a look, but the expression about the tightened lips made her heart sink. She had seen Soph look like that before.

Soph glanced curiously at the down-cast face, and burst out laughing.

"What's got the matter with you, girl?" said he, pinching her cheek. The rough touch of his hand, giving the faintest suggestion of a caress, called the red into her dusky cheek; the quick tears sprang to her eyes; but these she hastily wiped away, for the sight of tears always irritated Soph.

"I haven't saw you so put out over a little thing this long time."

She looked at him forlornly.

"If you're out with me because I wasn't your pardner at that dance of yours, you'll have to stay out. I tell you what it is, Di, I ain't a-going to be tied to no girl's string, and you might's well know it sooner as later."

Diantha heard him with meekness. Some hearts, tamed by love, learn submission even to insult from their keepers. She slipped her hand into his. "It wasn't that, Soph. It made me feel bad when you didn't come and talk to me . . . and I 'lowed you didn't care enough about me to take me out on the floor—like you used to."

His mouth hardened.

"Well, Di, I reckon you know you ain't the only girl in this country—there's others that have to be danced with asides you."

He freed his hand from hers and faced her, dogmatically.

"Look-a-here, Di, you go with the other fellows and when I want to go with you I'll let you know it. Why didn't you dance with Dick Mace that night and please your pa? I don't care how many times you go with Hopper, or Schuyler, or any other fel-

low. And I'll have some fun with the other girls and take you out now and then. How's that, now?" asked Soph, in a glow of self-approval.

Diantha, cruelly cut, yet proud enough to conceal her pain, drew back and turned away, trying to steady her quivering lips. They were down by the edge of the corn-patch. The corn was shocked, ready for husking. Dolly was grazing at a little distance.

"Then folks'll know how we stand," continued Soph.

"I don't want you to feel you're tied to me like," said Diantha, desperately. "You didn't use to feel that way. . . . Oh, don't you mind, Soph, what you said last winter . . . when we was to the dance at Post's?" hanging her head. "You said you was proud to dance with me . . . you said I was pretty."

Soph looked into the wistful face; he laughed shortly.

"Well, I like that; you want me to say you're pretty now. You'd ought to know I won't say nothin' of the kind when you come at me like that."

Her eyes dropped in her shame; her cheeks flamed and tingled painfully. She had thirsted for his old words of praise—they had been refused her in scorn. She would have given her life for the assurance that he loved her; but he would not say the words—he would never say them again! Oh, the anguish of love withdrawn! Nothing can surpass the bitterness that fills a woman's breast when dethroned by the hand that has exalted her.

"You use' to like me——" She drew near again and stroked his hand, then clung to it passionately. "Don't go back on me, Soph!"

Her appeal but snapped the thread that bound her quondam lover. Soph's patience gave way. He shook off the clinging fingers, saying, with brutal emphasis, "When did I give you a claim on me? Tell me that!"

The girl's ears rang as if from a violent blow; the field of stubble seemed to rock, and she was standing unsteadily; the wide eyes she turned on him were unseeing in their misery.

He glanced at her once or twice, then looked past her with an uneasy laugh.

"Now don't you go to making a fuss. That's always the way with you women; a fellow can't go with you more'n a few times without your making darned fools of yourselves. I haven't went with you to marry you. I haven't saw the girl yet I care to marry. It ain't my intention to get married for a good ten years, and I sha'n't go with one girl the whole time, neither. There's a-plenty of pretty girls a fellow can have more fun with; there's a darned sight more," he added, growing savage at the look in her eyes.

"Come," said Soph, moving on at last. "Are we goin' for Dolly, or ain't we?"

There were no more tears; but she could not speak; she could only shake her head dejectedly, conscious of nothing but the most poignant suffering.

Her action still further exasperated him.

"I don't give a fig for a girl that can't smile and look pleasant," said he. He kicked viciously at the stubble, then shook himself, as if to rid his mind of the disagree-

able impression left there by having to give a girl the "go-by," and strode back to the house, leaving the stricken figure down in the pasture; the cold sickness of her despair closed around her.

He took Estelle to meeting, and the two had a gay drive, for Soph was more than usually entertaining that night.

Reports of Soph Crimp's break with Diantha Bittern must have been swift and far-reaching, for within a week Phil Schuyler called—a thing he had never done before; and Diantha raised her drooping head and appeared with him in public at morning and evening meeting; and the young cattleman was said to be "setting in at Bittern's."

Escorted by Phil Schuyler, Diantha went to the Milligan dance; all night she danced tirelessly, often meeting Soph face to face in the quadrille, and doing the figures with him when it came her turn. Her spirits she forced to hysterical pitch; foremost among the girls, she rushed out into the night to cool hot cheeks and throbbing head; but once too often. . . . A keen wind had

blown up from the east; it was the time of the equinox. The air turned stinging cold, the sky was veiled with gray, and long before morning the flakes of the first snowstorm fell.

Her homeward drive chilled Diantha through. Dressed as she was, she flung herself on her bed, where she lay all day in a feverish stupor, her only attendant ignorant, careless Estelle. But when she found herself unable to rouse Diantha, alarm penetrated the unconcern of the girl, and she set off in the storm for their married sisters; a sick child engrossed the one, and in the absence of her husband the other was full of care. Dan lay senseless in a corner, at least doing them no harm. Diantha grew restless toward night; at times she was delirious, or she was wearily dancing, and she moaned for Soph, the first time his name had crossed her lips since their parting. Estelle kept the fire burning and the covers on her sister; it was all she knew. By the first streak of dawn she was out at the stable, harnessing Dolly; she would go for Dr. Peffer. It had cleared;

two inches of snow lay on the ground and there was a January sting in the air. The seven-mile drive to Arrowhead was a severe trip for six o'clock of a cold morning, though Dolly travelled well.

Dr. Peffer's office-door was open, and the doctor himself stood looking out at the weather. Cicely Atwood's words best described him: "He's a little man, awful neat, an' he has little bits of hands like Ruth Wood's."

"Well," said the doctor, in a rasping, high-pitched voice, as the girl pulled her horse to its haunches before his door. "Who's sick now?"

"My sister. She's took bad."

"Let me see—what's your name—Bittern?"

"Yep." For her life Estelle could not keep back the saucy reply.

The doctor drew out his pen-knife and opened it, looking over his well-kept finger-nails in search of one to trim.

"Your father owes me six dollars. When does he intend paying that little bill?"

Estelle's eyes snapped. "When he gets

read——" she began, but stopped herself. "He aims to pay you, all right, Dr. Peffer. But my sister's right sick and you're wanted bad; I come a-purpose to git you; she's been a-talkin' out of her head all night."

"When a bill's owing me," returned the doctor, paring a finger-nail with great nicety, "I make it a rule to suspend my services until it is paid." He shut the knife with emphasis and put it in his pocket, looking fixedly at the girl in the cart to note the effect of his words.

Estelle's face had looked blue and pinched when she first drew up; now it was blazing with color.

"Pa's sure aimin' to pay you agin he gits his 'taters sold."

"Sorry I can't oblige you, my girl."

Estelle gave Dolly a cut intended for the doctor, screaming, as the snow flew from the spinning wheels of her cart, "Arrowhead's the ugliest town of men I ever see, an' you're the ugliest man in it! Git up, git up, there!"

Mrs. Bunt and her daughter Polly visited the sick girl.

"Dianthy ain't long fur this world, pore soul," was the good woman's report. "She's took down with the noomony. I knowed what were the matter of her as soon as ever I laid eyes on her. Thur ain't nobody to look after her but that thur flighty Stelle. Stelle, she means all right—she do keers more fur Dianthy than what she lets on to; she's got more heart to her than ary one of them sisters of hern what's married to them Milliganses, but she don't know the first thing about keerin' fur sick folks. It takes women folks that's had some experiments of nursin' to pull a body through the noomony. That thur's a disease that's awful quick to kill in this hyur climate. Now they all say I'm a borned nurse, if I do say it myself. 'F I had the 'tendin' of Dianthy I'd have her up on her stumps afore she knowed whur she was. But like's not she wouldn't stay thur; she's the limbliest thing! When Stelle had the noomony two year back—she were took down in potato-plantin'—the noomony's more like to kill in potato-diggin'—she fit fur her life like a wild-cat. It were no time at all till she were

up agin, sassy as ever. But Dianthy ain't got no fight in her; an' it's a-goin' to be agin her gittin' up. 'Pears like she don't keers none whether she ever gits around agin or not. She 'pears like she were about played out on life sence her 'n' Soph quit keepin' comp'ny awhiles back. I've clean wore out all the patience I ever had on that girl, seein' her so took up with him. It ain't ben nothin' but Soph this an' Soph that an' Soph 'tother, goin' on three yur now. She ain't got no backbone to her; she's too tender-hearted to live; she might's well die as live—a little better; thur ain't no place on this yearth fur a girl 'thout ary a backbone to her make-up; folks ain't got no use fur sich. Dianthy, she ain't got no friends no more but them Wood girls an' a lot of hobos. Them Wood girls dotes on Dianthy; they don't know a flip girl when they see one.

"Thur paw, he's cleared out. Folks do say he's that feared of death you couldn't hire him to stay around whur thur's a bad case of sickness, fur fear it might eend that-a-way. They say when he come to hisself

after his last drunk, an' see Dianthy out of her head, he clapped on his hat an' lit out, an' he ain't ben seen or hearn of sence. I'm willin' to bet anything on our claim that man's in Oldtown on a spree. An' he don't aim to come home, neither, till Dianthy's up an' around or in her grave."

All Windy Creek was agog with curiosity when Hermia Wood went to take care of the invalid. Without doctor and without medicine, hers was no light task. The sick-room lacked every convenience; wood must be split to keep the fire going, water hauled by sled from a well half a mile distant; there was no food in the house, but potatoes were to be had for the digging, and a cow and chickens straggled about. Strength, patience, sympathy, were needful in the self-imposed nurse. Hermia, a novice yet, sometimes yielding to discouragement, sometimes carried away by too sanguine hope, gave what she could; and defiance of the doctor spurred Estelle to faithful drudgery.

A frequent caller was Mrs. Bunt. She gave freely of her supply of patent reme-

dies, and reminded Hermia that "nursin' were a powerful teedjous job." The married sisters came, unloading all their children, and went away complaining when ousted by the jealous nurse.

The frail body was racked with pain; but the mind of the sick girl was even more shaken. The long struggle to hold up her head and look her little world in the face, that no eye might see her mortal hurt, had ceased, and the reaction was sad to see. There had fallen upon her a great weariness of her life; the simple joy in existence was gone; the radiant dreams of her woman's destiny had been swept away, leaving her life barren and joyless. She suffered, nothing soothed; she was tired, yet found no rest; she was heavy, dull, stupid, yet sleep forsook her; a drowse often caught her away from those around her, but, dozing, a numbing misery oppressed her; waking, she followed with languid gaze the figure at her bedside, dully wondering why it should put her to so much trouble; she was weakly impatient of it; all she asked was to be let alone, to close her eyes, to give up the fight.

To the watcher's earthly vision it was plain that the weary soul was longing for release; it seemed infinitely better that Diantha should be at rest. Even while striving to knit together repellant body and soul, she caught herself sending up a prayer that the pitying Father might take the tired child home; and she marvelled at her own inconsistency.

The night was wearing away. Estelle, across the other bed, had fallen fast asleep. A sense of loneliness and helplessness crept over Hermia as with pained ear she listened to the uneven breathing of her patient, now quickened and heavy, now dying away until scarcely perceptible. If the unknown journey should begin to-night there would be no interval of consciousness at the passing of the soul; if awake at the starting, she would still have no fear, because so ignorant. She had been so harmless, so inoffensive while on this earth; her greatest sin was ignorance; would she wander unenlightened in the spirit-world as she had in this, or would the path be smoothed for her stumbling, childish feet? Oh, have pity on

this young soul, denied earth's sweetness, wrung with earth's bitterness, spent with earth's struggle!

So praying, the watcher, tired out, lost herself in dreams; and when she awoke Diantha was sleeping quietly.

Inexplicable to human mind the decree of Heaven: rest refused the jaded feet that had not trodden out their span of life; passage to an existence less obscure denied the groping, darkened soul not tried enough by fire. Diantha, reluctant, turned away her face from the unseen to work out anew the problem of her life.

The convalescence was a weary time, for the invalid was low in her spirits. No lady of high degree could have been more reticent concerning her love affair than Diantha, yet, in desultory talk with her nurse one day, she let fall the remark that she did love blue eyes, and she liked right light brown hair; and there was a note in her voice that told Hermia her thoughts still dwelt on the possessor of these charms, the beloved idol than whom no image of stone

could be more callous to the worship of humble suppliant.

Nurse and patient whiled away an hour looking over Diantha's treasures hoarded in an old cigar-box. In turning over the picture-cards and foolish valentines, the peppermint hearts with printed love-mottoes, and other trifles, the listless fingers closed lovingly round a half-smoked cigarette. And a tintype, gazed at long, with no other comment than a sigh, arrested Hermia, who fancied she could trace in one of the young fellows, rigged out in cowboy toggery, the features of Soph Crimp—the chin was certainly very like. There was a daguerreotype of Diantha's mother, long dead—a likeness of the sweet-faced girl who, in wedding Dan Bittern, had cast upon a villain's mercy yet other young, tender lives than her own.

On the day that Diantha first left her bed and sat wrapped up in a quilt, so wan, so worn, so hollow-eyed, Polly Bunt called to see her friend. She assured the invalid that she were lookin' awful bad—like she were goin' into a gallopin' consumption. She

chatted of the last dance, and discussed, in all its details, Rose Rooney's error. And then she said—all the while eying Diantha narrowly—that Soph Crimp had took Miss Bliss out ridin' in his cart last Sunday, and that he had took her to church in the evening; that he went with her reg'lar now, and it were all over that them two was engaged. The sick girl closed her eyes, but in her weakness the tears forced a way out and slid down her still face. And Polly went her way to tell how Diantha were takin' on awful over Soph's keepin' comp'ny with Miss Bliss.

A neighbor now and then dropped in, or a girl friend. But all Diantha's old flames seemed to have been allured away, for none came to call. A round-up had carried off Phil Schuyler to the Divide; but she, not knowing the cause of his absence, thought him as inconstant as the rest.

It is a serious thing—totally to discourage the young and the ignorant. Thrown back on herself and deeply disheartened, Diantha dwelt on one idea, until, on the day that Ruth came to take Hermia home,

she, clinging to her nurse, gave utterance to her brooding thoughts. She was tired of Windy Creek; she wanted to work out; would they look her up a place when they went back to the Springs? She knew she could do that kind of work, and she would soon be about again, as strong as ever.

What could the cousins do but promise to make the search? They left Diantha buoyed up by one desperate hope. A difficult quest it was, for ideal mistresses, willing to overlook all the disqualifications of such a girl as Diantha, and in all kindness and forbearance to take her from the beginning and train her for a servant, were rare indeed.

His superstitious fears allayed, Dan Bittern came home almost a maniac from drunkenness and carousing; and the tidings of his latest outrage flashed from claim to claim. On the dark, cold night of his return, he chased his two defenceless girls a mile across the prairie, at every step threatening to kill them, nor quitting his pursuit until both took refuge with their sister Malvina. His daughters had him arrested.

He was taken before the constable of the little town of Arrowhead, where Mr. Crimp appeared as his lawyer, bringing all his rusty eloquence to bear upon the case; it is needless to say the prisoner was acquitted.

While his homeless girls stayed at Malvina Milligan's, Dan, unmolested, kept solitary possession of his claim.

Young Schuyler, in the meantime, came home from the round-up, and now and then "went with" Diantha.

About this time a letter came by post to the friends of Diantha: an effectual reminder of her distress, if they had needed such. Although written in the stiff, fettered style of the illiterate, the cry of the impatient heart somehow made itself felt between the lines.

"ARROWHEAD, COLORADO, October 11th.

"DEAR FRIEND RUTH AND HERMIA,

"I Take my Pen in hand to let you know that I am well and hoping to find you the same.

"We have all the corn gethered. Estelle is helping Malvina and I am helping Joel husking corn.

"Have you found eny Lady yet that wants a Girl please see if you can get me a place and I will come down right off.

"I am tired of the ranche I want to stay in Town for awhile for a schange.

"I havent eny more to say so I will bring my letter to a close.

"From your Friend

"MISS DIANTHA, BITTERN."

"Write soon."

But two days after the coming of the letter, the good woman who was to develop Diantha's good points and bear with her faults was found.

The cousins dispatched to Arrowhead an answering letter, with directions to the girl to come at once. During these two days, however, affairs in the country had not been at a standstill.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when Malvina Milligan stepped out to the corn-crib to call Diantha. There was an unwonted quickening in her spiritless drawl.

"Dianthy! Hyur's somebody come to see ye. Better slick yourself up, first. He's in the livin' room."

Diantha's heart gave a leap, then fluttered

in a sickening way. She rose from her knees, brushing the dust and bits of dried corn-silk from the front of her dress. Could it be——? No, the dusty little bronco at the gate was none of the Crimp's; she did not remember seeing it before. In the kitchen she laid aside her shawl and washed her hands, reddened and bruised from the nature of her work, and saw in the glass a pale face, thinner than of old, the sweet lips quivering with excitement and weakness. She smoothed her hair and stepped into the next room.

A young man got up, awkwardly scraping his chair across the bare floor; it was Dick Mace; he shook her unresisting hand.

"Howdy, Dianthy. How's your health?"

"Toler'ble. Take a cheer, Dick." Her voice trembled; it was a disappointment; she had half expected to see Phil Schuyler. Feeling faint and sick, she sank into a chair.

"Ain't seed you fur quite a spell. You're looking poor—what they have been a-doin' to you, Dianthy?"

Diantha flushed under the implied pity of look and words.

"I was down sick fur awhile, but I'm right peart now."

"A good lookin' girl like you hadn't oughter get poor," said Dick, looking her admiringly in the face. He hitched his chair nearer. He was not a bad-looking fellow, when sober; he was young, not more than twenty-three; but he had a weak chin, and early dissipation had dulled the lustre of his eyes.

"I reckon you're s'prised at me fur comin' to see you," he began, hurriedly. "It was your fault I come back, Dianthy. Last time I seed you, I said I wouldn't plague you no more, and I ain't come to plague you now—leastways not to hurt; your pa don't know nothin' about me comin' to ask you, so there's nobody to touch you if you say no. I come on my own hook this time; I'm livin' on my claim over to Brierly, an' I want a woman to put on it. I heerd you was goin' with Phil Schuyler. I'd hate fur you to be his woman; I reckoned it wouldn't do no hurt fur me to come up an' see you about it.

"I ain't got nothin' agin you fur not

wantin' to dance with me when I was full. It was my fool way of doin'; let by-gones be by-gones, says I. I thought you was awful gritty to hold out agin yur pa like you done; I liked you all the better fur it.

"What do you think about us gittin' married, Dianthy? It would please me awful to go back to the claim man and wife."

Diantha hesitated, a "no" trembling on her lips. Keenly alive to the indignity of being given the "go-by," a disgrace only to be wiped out by an immediate and decisive stroke of marriage, wedlock, formerly her one ambition and the climax of her girlhood, was now her panacea, the remedy of all her ills. An offer of marriage had come; the chance was hers; and uncertainty made her as sick over her offer as she had been without one. If only it had come from Phil Schuyler! She would have married him in a moment had he asked her; for she liked him. But her homeless state and uncertain future, two grim spectres, stared her in the face and crowded back the faltering rejection.

She pressed her hand to her head: "Wait

a minute, Dick; I 'low I'll go out chur in the yard whur I kin think."

She would go to Estelle and talk it over with her. Estelle would help her think. Her head whirled so; Estelle allus was so stiddy-headed.

Dick Mace tipped back his chair and slid his hands into his pockets, and waited, whistling; he was confident of success.

Without, Diantha was being hurried to her fate. Her sister Malvina met her at the corner of the house. The girl leaned for support against the shed-kitchen, her knees trembling, a white line about her twitching mouth.

"D'ye want to be a old maid, Dianthy?"

It was the fretful insistence of the theme she most dreaded.

"I 'low you will be if you don't take him," said Malvina, jerking her head toward the house.

"I an' Phil Schuyler's keepin' comp'ny, Viny; I aim to marry him some day."

"Yes, if he asks you! I see him askin' you! He's playin' off with you like that Soph Crimp done. Thur ain't no man in

these parts is goin' to ask you to marry them: d'ye want to know why?"

Diantha winced.

"You're too old, that's why, 'most twenty-one, an' not married yit, nor even engaged to be. It ain't decent fur a girl to act like you. Shame on you!" and Malvina made the gesture with her forefingers that children make when they call down shame on a culprit. "Old maid's what everybody's callin' you now; 'gainst Phil's done goin' with you, you'll be a old maid past askin' fur, like them Wood girls."

Estelle burst out from the shed where she had been eaves-dropping.

"Don't you go listen to that old cat, Di! Phil's all right. He'll ask you next dance, see if he don't."

"Shet yourself, you sassy thing! If Dianthy ain't got the sense to git her a man others has got to hustle fur her."

Malvina paused, turning over in her callous, passionless mind the most forceful argument to thrust Diantha to a decision. "We can't keep you no longer, Dianthy. You've got to pack up an' quit this hyur

claim. I an' Joel's too poor to keep a old maid on charity."

"Scat!" said Estelle, making a face.

Faint and muffled came Diantha's tones.

"Them Wood girls, they've give thur word to look me up a place in the Springs to work out. I ain't meanin' to live off you an' Joel fur long. I'm right sure I do all I kin fur my keep, Viny."

"You work out! You'd be back on my hands inside of a week. City folks ain't agoin' to resk thur work on a girl that ain't worth thur keep. Nobody'll have you!"

Diantha turned and wavered; opened her lips to speak and shut them; and started for the house. But Estelle, springing after her, threw her arms around her neck and held her in a fierce embrace. "Don't, Di! don't do it, Di!"

"You'll be a old maid," said Malvina, with dull reiteration, "if you don't take Dick."

Diantha untwined the clinging arms. Hard lines were stamped about her mouth, and the tension of her features gave them an expression of unwonted firmness. She

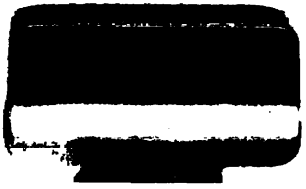
brushed her little sister's brown cheek with her lips, and passed into the house.

In the living room beyond she stood face to face with Dick.

"I'm willin' to marry you, Dick," said she.

. . . . . .

The one o'clock train due at Arrowhead already shook the ground with its heavy pounding. Lounging in the door-way of his little office, the justice of the peace whistled abstractedly as he gazed across at two figures waiting on the platform. A cow-boy half across the street reined up, sharply; a slouching brim shaded his face, and spurs clanked on his boot-heels. Like an automaton he sat his restive horse, gazing transfixed at the apparition of Diantha in her soiled white dress, her worn little satchel carried in one hand, with the other clinging to the arm of Penitentiary Dick. As in a dream, young Schuyler saw him grasp her arm to assist her up the steps—it was her first experience of a railway train—saw their swift recognition of himself, noted Dick's backward look of triumph, the

cloud of disappointment gather in her eyes, heard the grinding of the wheels, the clanging of the bell as the train swept away; and awoke from dreaming in time to see the girl for whom he had waited three years, snatched from him by another.

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